MARIE ANTOINETTE

BY

THE MARQUIS DE SÉGUR

C03975871

DC
137.1
.S44
1928

E839244

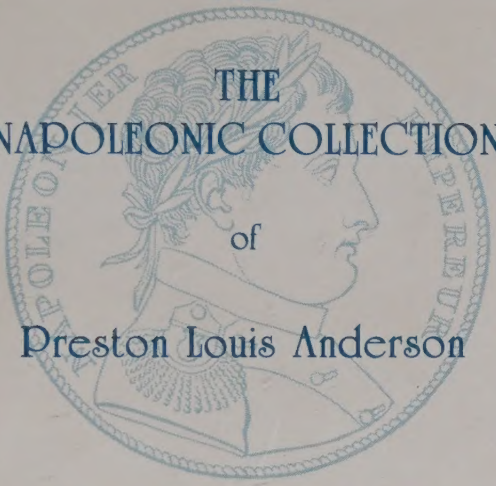
LIBRARY
The University of Texas
at San Antonio

From

THE
NAPOLEONIC COLLECTION

of

Preston Louis Anderson



Donated to the UTSA Library

by

Rosemary Anderson Son

1984

MARIE ANTOINETTE

QUEEN MARIE ANTOINETTE
AT THE AGE OF SEVENTEEN

(From the portrait by Drouais (1727-75). Jones Bequest, Victoria and Albert Museum)

[*front.*

MARIE ANTOINETTE

BY

THE MARQUIS DE SÉGUR

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY
1928

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

MARY CAROLINE WATT

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
THE EDINBURGH PRESS, 9 AND 11 YOUNG STREET, EDINBURGH

LIBRARY
The University of Texas
At San Antonio

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	FOREWORD	ix
I.	THE ARCHDUCHESS	1
II.	THE DAUPHINE	26
III.	ACCESSION AND CORONATION	52
IV.	THE ERA OF FOLLY	79
V.	THE HEART OF A QUEEN	106
VI.	THE QUEEN AND THE MINISTERS	136
VII.	THE QUEEN AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS	170
VIII.	THE REVOLUTIONARY CRISIS	200
IX.	THE STRUGGLE	239
X.	CALVARY	278

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Queen Marie Antoinette, at the age of Seventeen . *Front.*
(*From the portrait by Drouais* (1727-75). *Jones Bequest, Victoria and Albert Museum*)

PAGE

Louis XVI. 72
(*Victoria and Albert Museum*)

Count Axel Fersen 126

Queen Marie Antoinette and Children — Madame Royale, The Dauphin and the Duc de Normandie, afterwards Louis XVII 194
(*Artist unknown. Jones Bequest, Victoria and Albert Museum*)

A. P. J. M. Barnave 244

The Royal Family in Prison in the Temple . . 280
(*After a painting by E. M. Ward, R.A.*)

Louis XVI. At the Bar of the Convention . . 284
(*After a painting by W. Miller. British Museum*)

The Sixteenth of October 1793 312

FOREWORD

The late distinguished author of this life of the unfortunate Queen, whose memory still creates alike ardent partisans and bitter foes, was the great-grand-nephew of the celebrated General of the First Empire, who wrote the *Histoire de Napoléon et de la Grande Armée pendant l'Année* 1812—a work which has been translated into almost every European language. The family of de Ségur was originally of Guienne, and has ever been distinguished in arms and in letters, and also for its sufferings in the Huguenot cause.

The late Marquis, who died in 1916, might by reason of his title, savouring as it does of the Ancien Régime, have been suspected of a Royalist bias unfavourable to calm and sober history. The reader will, however, certainly discover no such bias in his life of Marie Antoinette, for, truth to tell, he seems somewhat more severe than indulgent in his estimate of his heroine.

Of the book itself I cannot do better than quote, by way of introduction, a few passages from the able review of the original which was published in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 5th May 1921, and which so interested me that I at once procured the book and tried to put it into English.

"With ease, urbanity, competence, and feeling, M. de Ségur has produced a touching image of the unhappy Queen of France, which, while awaking our sympathies for the ill-fated woman, reveal the causes of her tragic adventures as Queen. . . . The last

twenty years have added many a detail to the portrait of Marie Antoinette. The discovery in Sweden of her correspondenee with Count Fersen, and, still better, the discovery of her letters to Barnave—have thrown fresh light on those mysterious intrigues between the Throne and the Revolutionary leaders which followed the failure of the flight to Varennes. Besides this, the researches of M. Lenôtre, M. Funck-Brentano, M. Madélin, and M. de Ségur himself have collected and set in order all the flotsam and jetsam which the sea of time rejects when it at last gives up its dead, so that the materials are at hand for a reconstruction of the Queen's sad story. . . . The elegance, the lucidity, the proportions of a work produced by an artist who is also an accomplished scholar are to be admired."

This is high praise, but all who read the book in the original will, I am sure, agree with every word of it.

It has been no easy task to put such graceful French into readable English. It has been impossible to preserve the full bouquet of the undecanted wine. My more experienced readers will be my more lenient critics.

MARY CAROLINE WATT.

MARIE ANTOINETTE

CHAPTER I

THE ARCHDUCHESS

Marie Antoinette! To dare to make her the subject of a series of lectures would seem at first sight to argue either overweening confidence or a somewhat artless simplicity. Now I am not conspicuously courageous but I am fairly clear-sighted. When, therefore, I was asked to treat of the Queen's history in this place, I foresaw, as may be imagined, innumerable objections and difficulties. This historic figure is so well known, so renowned, that one cannot hope to reveal new characteristics. After so many years she still seems very near and we cannot think of her without being stirred very deeply. For us she is the Queen, simply The Queen, as Louis XIV was The King—the last Queen of France, the heroine of the saddest, the most terrible drama of history. Her name evokes passionate emotions and provokes discussions vibrating with the anger, the spite and the enduring hatred of parties. In short, it is both a difficult and a perilous subject. These considerations and others of a like nature should have prevented my coming here to-day, and all reasonable people would have respected my scruples.

Nevertheless, after due reflection, I decided otherwise. Marie Antoinette, I thought, is certainly a very well-known figure, but perhaps her *true* personality has never been revealed, for she has almost

always been portrayed by prejudiced observers. No human being, at any period of time, has been described under so many different aspects. During her lifetime she was the most vilified, the most calumniated woman of her century. In her family, among her relations, at Court, with the nobility, she was the victim of the foulest accusations. Everything possible was done to misinterpret her actions and to tarnish her memory. A numerous and powerful cabal pursued her with pitiless fury to the very brink of the grave, and it was from the Palace of Versailles that the original calumnies sprang, which eventually spread among the mob, and finally delivered her into the hands of the executioner.

After her death the tide turned. Her sufferings, her humiliations, her tragic destiny, her dignity in distress, the horror of her last moments, have all combined to envelop her in a dazzling, perplexing haze. Her death has shielded her life from the verdict of posterity, and the greater number of her biographers, in respectful compassion, have agreed to throw a veil of approval over her whole existence, and have drawn, as it were, an ideal portrait from the cradle to the tomb.

To arrive at the real facts among these many conflicting views, to praise and to blame, to steer a middle course between deliberate spite and equally deliberate indulgence, is doubtless a difficult task, but it is one that should commend itself to all lovers of truth. I do not presume to assert that I shall be successful, but at least I will make the effort. I will strive to get rid of my inherited instincts and personal sentiments and will seek the truth only, lead it where it may. I know that by following such a course I shall run the risk of criticism from both parties, and that no one person will be quite satisfied. Still, I know my audience. I have more than once put it to

the proof and I have confidence in its breadth of view, and its enlightened tolerance. I claim its indulgence, and I, for my part, will be absolutely sincere. I especially desire at the outset to say that I profoundly trust that I shall not wound any real conviction, and I also promise that the subject shall be approached with all respect and sympathy, for it can never be forgotten that Marie Antoinette during her last years wore a martyr's crown. We have now to determine whether she is not also a saint. Anyhow, saint or no, she was a woman, very woman indeed, in every sense of the word. She is, perhaps, the most typical representative of her sex, with all its varied instincts, passions, graces and weaknesses. Alternately—almost simultaneously—she showed herself capable of the most irritating inconsequences and the most generous impulses. She was most womanly, most endearing, and therefore as I remarked just now, the last Queen of France, who lived and died one hundred and fifty years ago, seems still near, and like ourselves, a creature of flesh and blood, who struggled, loved, laughed, wept and suffered, and for whom the most prejudiced judge cannot but feel a secret tenderness.

Maria Theresa, Empress of Germany, and her consort Francis of Lorraine, had sixteen children ; ten boys and six girls, ten of whom grew to maturity. The ninth child and sixth daughter was Marie Antoinette Josephine Jeanne of Austria and Lorraine, the future wife of Louis XVI.

She was born at five o'clock in the afternoon of 2nd November 1755—All Souls' Day (the day of the dead)—and at that very hour an earthquake destroyed the town of Lisbon ; more than 30,000 persons were buried in the ruins, and the King and Queen of Portugal, the chosen sponsors of the infant Princess, had to fly from their palace. The terrible

coincidence, which in after years was looked upon as a foreshadowing of the dark future, was not commented upon at the time. And we must remember that many other children, who were to lead gentle, peaceful, uneventful lives, came into the world on the same day! Still, it is impossible to ignore such a striking event. The little Archduchess was baptized next day by the Archbishop of Vienna. There were the usual popular rejoicings and the child was given into the charge of a nurse named Marie Constance Hoffmann, wife of a magistrate.

There is not much to tell of the years of infancy. Together with her brothers and sisters, Madame Antoine (as she was called in Vienna) passed the greater part of the year at Schönbrunn, that counterpart of Versailles. The winters she spent at Burg, the Viennese Louvre. The imperial children led an easy, free existence; there was almost a complete absence of etiquette, and their parents were models of virtue. The Emperor Francis was very good-hearted and religious and fairly intelligent. Maria Theresa, a perfect consort and accomplished ruler, displayed a strength of character which indicated that she was the masculine element in the august household. However, her genius for statesmanship did not in the least detract from her charm as a woman. She knew how to please, when necessary, and in the course of her eventful life, her seductive smile was as useful an asset as her forceful energy. With her children, however, she was more authoritative than tender, and the respect which she inspired was founded mainly on fear. She was, moreover, too busy to supervise personally the details of their education. She trusted to rules and regulations, and considered that she did her part when she drew these up, expecting tutors and governesses to see that they were carried out.

Marie Antoinette was provided with two governesses. The first was the Countess of Brandeiss, a kindly creature, not overburdened with either brains or force of character, and who for the latter reason won the heart of her little pupil, as is proved by the following naïve note penned by the Archduchess when she was ten years old ; it is the earliest known specimen of her handwriting : " My dearest Brandeiss : I send you my very best greetings. Indeed, my dear Brandeiss, all my good wishes come from my very grateful heart. I trust that in future my docility will reward you for all the trouble you are taking with my education. Continue to help me, dear friend, and be sure that your faithful pupil loves you dearly.—Antoine." As a matter of fact, the faithful pupil played much more than she worked. With her sister Caroline, she frolicked about the woods all day, either afoot, driving or sleighing, always followed by her beloved dogs, her favourite mopsies, with their pointed noses and russet coats, yapping around her and tearing her clothes. The feeble remonstrances of Madame de Brandeiss were but a very slight check on her wild gaiety.

When she was nearly fourteen, a second and very different governess appeared upon the scene. Madame de Lerchenfeld was delicate, and therefore somewhat irritable, but her firmness prevailed to a certain degree, and the Princess occasionally took some interest in her studies. Mesner did his best to improve her handwriting, Sainville gave her French lessons, Metastasio instructed her in Italian, Noverre was her dancing-master, and there were others who taught her the rudiments of music and drawing. She was very intelligent and learned quickly, but still more quickly forgot what she had learned, whilst the slightest hint of amusement was sufficient to distract her from her studies. In short, her progress was slow.

Her first real sorrow was the death of her father, who was struck down by an apoplectic seizure on 18th August 1765, whilst assisting at the marriage of one of his sons, the Grand Duke of Tuscany. The Emperor, on the point of starting on his journey to Italy, from which he was never to return, had taken his little daughter in his arms and had kissed her, shedding tears the while. Long, long afterwards, during her own misfortunes, she was wont to declare that this sad farewell was a foreshadowing of the fate in store for her. The Emperor left for his children a long written instruction, full of wise counsels, some of which seem almost prophetic as applied to the future Queen of Versailles. "The companions we select," he remarks, "are of great moment, for frequently we are drawn by them, in spite of ourselves, into temptations, which, without them, might never have assailed us. Friendship is one of the joys of life—only we must choose our friends wisely and not lavish affection carelessly." There are numerous exhortations against extravagance and against the dangers of high play. He enjoins his descendants to read these fatherly counsels twice a year. Alas! this touching epistle shared the usual fate of such epistles: it was read once, then laid aside and forgotten.

Some badly-painted portraits, which are preserved at the Court of Vienna, give us an idea of the Archduchess Antoine at this period. She is a slim, long-limbed maiden, with an oval face and bright blue eyes, her fair unpowdered hair carefully combed back from her forehead and half hidden under a tight satin cap. She is grasping a fan and holding herself stiffly as if on parade, but it is easy to see that the moment she escapes from the drawing-room she will be just a lively child, whose vivacity and love of pleasure are the despair of her tutors. However,

she was very sweet-tempered, very sensitive and always ready to repent when she had been in the wrong. Moreover, she was delightfully natural and capable of sound judgment. She was invariably anxious to please, and, according to her mother, "receives very prettily and always has something polite and gracious to say." Such was Marie Antoinette, when, in the year 1764, the idea of her marriage to the French Dauphin, heir to the throne of Louis XV, began to be vaguely entertained.

This marriage scheme was obviously purely a political affair. An alliance was needed to resist the encroachments of Prussia, English jealousies, and also to check the development of Russia ; it followed that the Courts of Versailles and Vienna sought to strengthen this alliance by family ties. Choiseul, who at that time was Louis the Fifteenth's Prime Minister, is said to have originated the scheme: he certainly furthered it to the best of his ability.

During the preliminary discussions of the matter with the Comte de Stahrenberg, the Austrian Ambassador, no one of the group of young Archduchesses was specially indicated, and if Marie Antoinette was ultimately suggested as a fitting consort for Louis Auguste, Duc de Berry, now Dauphin through the death of his father, it was merely because the ages of the two children were suitable, there being but a year of difference between them. There is no trace of any official negotiation. The scheme appears to have begun with an implied suggestion, which slowly matured in the course of friendly conversation. All had been virtually decided long before any official announcement took place.

The Austrian Court was apparently more eager to clinch the matter. In February 1767 the French Ambassador, the Marquis de Durfort, was told to

listen with caution to any "gossip" concerning the Archduchess Antoinette.

Nevertheless, Durfort was the central object of attention at Court; he was the honoured guest at friendly gatherings, and the Empress showered little kindly, friendly gifts on him, such as pears and peaches in January, and the like. Finally—delicate symbolic touch—at a fête held in honour of Marie Antoinette's birthday, the display of fireworks ended with a splendid blazing dolphin (Dauphin) spouting flames and smoke through the nostrils.

About this time the Archduchess began a really French education. In November 1768 Maria Theresa asks Mercy Argenteau to send her without delay an ecclesiastic capable of directing, guiding and teaching the little Princess. "I am anxious," she writes, "to know who will be chosen as my daughter's confessor. I also want a hairdresser for her, but I leave it all in Choiseul's hands." History is silent as to the hairdresser, but it is far from silent regarding the confessor, for *he* was the Abbé de Vermond, and his name will ever be associated with the name of Marie Antoinette. Vermond was at this time about thirty-five years of age. He was of humble origin and had formerly been Grand Vicaire to Loménie de Brienne, Archbishop of Sens. At the moment, however, he lived in Paris and was Librarian at the Mazarin College. The Bishop of Orleans and the Archbishop of Sens made him known to Choiseul, who in his turn recommended him to Mercy Argenteau. He left for Vienna in December 1768 and entered at once upon his important duties. Many and different tales are told of the Abbé. He is depicted in some memoirs as a vile intriguer in the pay of the Austrian Government to the detriment of his native land, and seeking, if not to ruin the intelligence of his august pupil, at any rate to obscure her mind and judgment. This portrait

of the Abbé is, however, unjust. He was in reality a prudent, honourable, fairly-learned man, of indifferent intelligence, it is true, but truly conscientious and devoted. His private life was circumspect and decent, and though he was not a brilliant wit, he possessed a kind of worldly tact which stood him in good stead at Court. He was a great, but never an indiscreet, talker. His kindliness appealed to the little Archduchess, to whom he was soon sincerely and warmly attached. Alas ! however, neither in Vienna nor in after years at Versailles did he succeed in making any *serious* impression on her. She listened gracefully to what he said, smiled amiably and usually went her own way.

The Abbé arrived at Christmas, and accordingly almost the first move in the game was the hearing of his imperial pupil's confession. He records his dismay at this inevitable duty, for good priest though he was, this confessor hated hearing confessions. However, the sweetness and childish confidence of his penitent touched his heart, and he soon became very fond of her. In his letters to Mercy we read how he tried to get her to study seriously. Here, indeed, he found an untilled field—at thirteen years of age Madame Antoine was almost entirely ignorant. She hated reading, she wrote a wretched hand, her spelling was impossible, she knew next to nothing of either history or geography. Certainly she jabbered away in French, but it was a very extraordinary style of French—a sort of jargon, interladen with German expressions.

However, Vermond was courageous and tactful. At first he only insisted on one hour a day of really serious work, and that hour was given up to French conversation. He gradually added lectures and history lessons, choosing picturesque and easy subjects. He managed to interest the child and soon she was happy

for hours together with him and he was admitted into the family circle. He found her very docile and willing, with an excellent and retentive memory, but he had to struggle perpetually with her frivolous nature ; it always seemed as though when he thought her attention was really caught, her thoughts would, as it were, be off in pursuit of some trifling pleasure. Marie Antoinette's vexatious and fatal faculty of perceiving the weaknesses and oddities of others was, moreover, a great grief to Vermond. For example, he would be reading to her from some fine moral volume wherein the manners and customs of polite society were charmingly portrayed, and she would suddenly burst into a peal of laughter and interrupt with the most absurd remarks, mockingly applying what he had read to the various members of her entourage. Naturally, on such occasions, the good Abbé's carefully prepared homily fell very flat indeed.

In spite of all, however, after two years of patience, there is a visible improvement, and Vermond modestly congratulates himself. " There is more in her than we would have believed. . . . She is quite capable of reasoning and of forming correct judgments, and she knows perfectly how to behave. She has learnt a good deal about history, and I am sure that essential details are well fixed in her mind and that she will not forget them. At last she speaks French fairly well. Only a few awkward expressions remain, and those she will soon give up when she no longer hears the German and bad French of those around her here." Probably, indeed, she was as well informed as any princess of her period, or of any period, for that matter. Her personal appearance, too, had improved as well as her inner intelligence. Here is Vermond's portrait : " She seems more charming every day. There may be more regularly beautiful faces, but you will hardly find a more fascinating one. Her manner and her gait

begin to take on an air of grace and nobility that are truly surprising at her age. When she is just a little taller, the French will have an ideal sovereign lady."

On hearing this glowing account of the young Archduchess, Louis XV declared that he must obtain a portrait of the girl who was destined so soon to become the bright, particular star of the Court of Versailles. Austrian artists were quite incompetent, and the King was anxious to send Drouais to Vienna. However, the sum (80,000 francs) demanded by the painter was considered exorbitant, and the commission was finally entrusted to the less expensive Ducreux.

Count Esterhazy was at the same time despatched to Vienna with a portrait of the Dauphin, and this errand, be it noted, was the initial stage of his future friendship with Marie Antoinette. Thus, though no definite word had been spoken, the projected alliance became daily more and more of a certainty. A determined opponent was removed from the scene by the almost sudden death of Marie Josephe of Saxony, mother of the Dauphin, who had ardently desired a Saxon princess as daughter-in-law. The stubborn resistance of Madame Adelaide, the King's eldest daughter, who opposed the marriage because she was prejudiced against all things Austrian, was borne down by Choiseul's steady persistence, supported as he was by Louis XV himself ; and so, unofficially, preparations for the wedding went on in both Courts. A special theatre was constructed at Versailles, whilst carriages for the wedding processions were being built in Paris, and Mercy Argenteau ordered the trousseau, for which he had been allowed the sum of 400,000 francs.

The Ambassador, who was the Empress's confidential adviser, was already greatly disturbed as he reflected on the evil example to which the future Dauphine would be exposed at Versailles. She

would have to steer her course between the smiles of the Du Barry, the intrigues of Mesdames, the King's daughters, and the perpetual bickerings of the whole royal family. Mercy Argenteau sighed, and tried to think out suitable methods of warning and preparing the inexperienced, impulsive Archduchess for the difficulties that were awaiting her.

In the month of July 1769 the important details of the approaching alliance began to be openly discussed. Maria Theresa decides that her daughter must look really French, and so a Parisian hairdresser dresses Marie Antoinette's flaxen tresses "à la française." Her waist, which hitherto has been left to Dame Nature, is laced into regulation size, and for three months she has to endure the ministrations of a French dentist (le Sieur Laveran), for her little white teeth are rather irregular. She is drilled in the regulation curtsies of Versailles and the interminable Court etiquette. Details concerning important living French personages are included in her studies of history, and by way of relaxation she is made to read *L'Etat militaire de la France*. The Abbé Vermond declares delightedly that she will soon be sure of all the names and all the colours of the various regiments. She is, moreover, taught pretty little speeches, which will be likely to please in the land of her adoption.

"Over which European country would you prefer to be Queen?" asks her august mother. "I would choose France," Marie Antoinette replies instantly, "because it is the country of Henri IV and Louis XIV —the one so good, the other so great." This graceful speech is, of course, at once reported to Mercy for the edification of Louis XV.

The financial aspects of the contract had to be considered. The dowry of the Archduchess consisted of 200,000 florins, with jewels of equal value. The King of France on his part, assigned to the future

Dauphine an annual sum of 20,000 golden crowns and jewels valued at 200,000 crowns ; the exact amount of a further sum for her maintenance was not decided on at the moment.

The 4th April 1770 witnessed the signing of the marriage contract, and Marie Antoinette on the same day received the official congratulations of the Court. On the 15th of the month, the Marquis de Durfort, splendidly escorted, made his official entrance, as Envoy Extraordinary, to ask for the hand of the Princess ; finally, on Thursday, 19th April, at six in the evening, the marriage by proxy was celebrated in the Augustinian Chapel. The Papal Nuncio officiated, the Archduke Ferdinand was the Dauphin's representative, and the bride, robed in silver tissue, knelt beside her mother. She had made a three days' retreat during the preceding week, and on the eve of her bridal the Empress dictated to her her first letter to the King of France. This letter is a purely official affair, and contains nothing of interest, but Maria Theresa adds a few intimate touching lines addressed to Louis XV. "I trust," she says, "that Your Majesty will deign to direct her and to tell her her duties. She has the best will in the world, but she is so young, pray forgive her if she is sometimes a trifle giddy and careless. I confide her to your care, the priceless pledge of the happy alliance which exists between our Houses."

The departure for Versailles was fixed for Saturday, 24th April. During these last days Maria Theresa devoted herself entirely to her daughter, giving up all her manifold royal duties. She even insisted on the child's sleeping with her in her own room every night, so that her motherly counsels might be undisturbed. She also drew up a rule of life to be read through every month. These written instructions were a kind of institution at the imperial Court. They consisted of pious counsels, such as reading

no book without the permission of one's confessor, and other more practical precepts. Among the latter may be noticed this excellent advice : " Do not take upon yourself any responsibility, and if you want to be happy, do not listen to gossip. Always be gracious to every one, affable and dignified. You must, however, know how to say ' no '." The Empress continues: " Destroy my letters ; I will destroy yours." To-day we know—and we cannot but be rather glad—how this latter counsel was obeyed. Alas ! all the other good advice fell on equally stony ground—which is much to be deplored.

At half-past nine in the morning, the carriages were ready. The Empress took her daughter in her arms and murmured a few last words. " Farewell, my dearest child. You will be far, far away. Be just, be kind, never forget the obligations of your royal rank. . . . You are very attractive ; devote yourself to pleasing your consort and be so good to the French people that they will say that I have sent them an angel." Sobs choked her last words, and the Dauphine was so overcome that she had literally to be carried to the waiting chariot, which slowly moved away amid the tears of the Court and of the inhabitants of Vienna. Mother and daughter were to meet no more in this world.

The journey was accomplished slowly and by short stages. At the head of the cavalcade rode the Comte de Stahrenberg and the Dauphine and her ladies occupied the leading carriage. Before very long she revived a little ; by degrees she regained her girlish gaiety and high spirits ; finally there was plenty of lively talk. The frontier was passed at Kehl, where the Comte de Noailles, King's Messenger, was awaiting the " surrender " of the girl who was henceforth to be French and French only. The official ceremony was held in a temporary wooden structure, which had

been put up on an islet of the Rhine. Etiquette prescribed that the Dauphine should be divested of every article of clothing, to be robed anew in garments brought from France. Her toilette concluded, her Austrian attendants bade her farewell and the Comtesse de Noailles and other ladies of the French Court gathered round Marie Antoinette. All went off excellently. Only one false note was struck in the harmonious whole. In decorating the pavilion the walls had been hung with magnificent tapestries, setting forth the story of Jason and Medea; bloody scenes of murdered children and avenging furies were freely displayed. Goethe, an eye-witness, was justly horrified. "What?" he writes to a friend, "just as the young Princess is about to set foot on her future husband's soil they actually show her pictures of the most horrible marriage that has ever been imagined!" But it is a poet who was thus disturbed at the dismal augury which was unnoticed by the general public and by Marie Antoinette herself.

That same evening a magnificent reception was held in Strasbourg. The ancient city was delirious with joy; the celebrations were on a most lavish scale. Whole oxen were roasted in the squares of the town, the fountains spouted wine, and bread was flung about in such profusion that even the very poorest trod it underfoot.

Marie Antoinette is said to have made a tactful little remark during the Strasbourg rejoicings. When the Mayor began his address to her in German, she exclaimed: "Ah! do not say it in German, for from henceforth I will only listen to French!"

Indeed, quite apart from the ordered and official enthusiasm it is evident that this first meeting of the Dauphine with her future subjects was altogether favourable. In a strictly private letter Mercy states that "Our Archduchess on her debut in Strasbourg

surpassed all our hopes and wishes by her dignified bearing, her grace and her tact." This successful impression was maintained during the rest of the journey, at Saverne, at Nancy, at Châlons and finally at Soissons, where she spent the last night before meeting the King and Court.

On 13th May, at nightfall, Louis XV and the royal family came to Compiègne, at which place the Dauphine was expected to arrive next day. On the 14th, at three o'clock in the afternoon, the King with the Dauphin, and Mesdames took their places in a State coach. A halt was called at the bridge of Berne on the edge of the forest. The Princes of the blood and the great Court dignitaries were already assembled. Choiseul, by special permission, had gone a few leagues farther on in order to be the first to welcome the august traveller, to whom he was presented by the Ambassador Stahrenberg. "I shall never forget, sir," said Marie Antoinette, "that it is to you that I owe my happiness." "And that of France as well," was Choiseul's gallant response. She chatted graciously with him during these last few miles of her long journey. At the first glimpse of the approaching procession, Louis alighted and stepped forward, escorted by the Dauphin. The young Princess sprang lightly from her carriage, almost ran towards the King, and gracefully sank to her knees before him. He raised her, embraced her, and presented the Dauphin who, as in duty bound, "saluted her on the cheek." During the little scene a squad of military kept back with difficulty an immense crowd of workmen, citizens and peasants, whose boisterous cheers expressed pleasure and possibly hope. Soon the royal party returned to the castle, where the usual presentations and congratulations went forward. The King was in high spirits, the Dauphin was as usual—cold, silent and shy.

Here we will pause a little and consider the bridal

pair as they appeared to others at the critical moment of their first meeting with one another.

Louis-Auguste, Dauphin of France, was born on 23rd August 1754, and was now nearly sixteen years of age. During the years of infancy he had been delicate, but the constant care lavished upon him, healthful exercise in fresh air (he had been brought up at the castle of Bellevue) and, doubtless, the inherited robust health of the Bourbons had prevailed over the lymphatic constitution derived from his mother. He was now a big, sturdy lad, strongly made and somewhat heavy, but very different from what he in after years became, when the startled citizens of Varennes beheld a huge, clumsy figure of a man descend from the famous berline. His slight tendency to stoutness made him look more than his age. As long as he remained seated, there was an effect of a kind of youthful majesty, but the good impression vanished as soon as he rose to his feet, for he held himself badly and was incapable of standing still. His rather full face, aquiline nose and bright complexion were pleasing, but his teeth were faulty and spoiled his smile. He had gentle, short-sighted, rather melancholy eyes; unfortunately, he was so shy that he never dared to look people in the face, and so appeared to be somewhat crafty and cunning. His voice was gruff, unmusical, and whenever he became excited, uncontrolled. He affected (except on gala occasions) a modest, careless mode of dress. He would sport a grey or brown coat, unadorned by either lace or embroidery, and a plain steel sword. His hair would be in disorder—in fact, his whole appearance might be called untidy, almost dirty. At the very outset of his married life his wife frequently and justifiably complained of his indifference to his personal appearance. The inner man resembled the somewhat unattractive exterior. He had been left absolutely to his governor, the Duc de la Vauguyon,

a worthy, narrow-minded individual, foolishly despotic in character and jealous of any influence other than his own. The Dauphin was kept in complete seclusion and had no communication whatever with the outer world. However, his tutor, the Abbé de Radonvilliers, had instructed him well, particularly in history and geography. His memory, moreover, was remarkable. But his cloistered existence increased his natural inclination to shyness and unsociability. When constrained on state occasions to appear at Court, he was openly ill at ease and unhappy. Ministers, courtiers, ambassadors, above all the King, his grandfather, terrified him, paralysed him—as he himself expressed it—"made him ill." He was silent unless directly addressed, when he would burst into a loud guffaw, which made him appear imbecile, which was very far from being the case. He had, indeed, excellent judgment and a fair amount of penetration and method. Two years after the marriage his wife did him justice as to these qualities. "He has," she says, "a love of justice, order, truth, and besides, a great deal of good sense and right feeling in his way of regarding affairs; but," she adds, "I dread his indolence and a sort of apathy, a want of nerve, without which one cannot think or feel quickly enough to be really efficient." Marie Antoinette hits the mark in thus deploring the fatal inertia which was Louis' stumbling-block during his whole career—the cause of all his blunders and of all his misfortunes.

The Dauphin's natural timidity was, unhappily, accompanied by a good deal of vulgarity. He was good and kind, yet he frequently offended by odious tricks and doubtful jokes. He was particularly unpleasant when in happy mood. His plebeian manners horrified old courtiers, such as the Duc de Croy, who plaintively exclaimed: "If only he could be taught how to behave!" By way of counteracting his tendency to corpulence and working off

his spare energy, he affected tremendously hard exercise, such as sawing wood, felling trees and hammering iron. Riding and hunting were not enough for him; he preferred helping the park and castle workmen in their various tasks. He had a huge appetite and cared more about the quantity than the quality of the food placed before him. It is hardly necessary to add that the youth avoided women, had nothing to say to them, was actually terrified when forced to be in their society. This attitude of mind might have explained his virtuous life, but it is only fair to say that he was sincerely religious and held very strict views as to morals. He was, moreover, singularly immature.

Louis XV, as was natural, regarded his grandson with increasing perplexity not unmixed with dismay. "He is very unlike other men," the King would mutter ironically. The Dauphin, on his part, viewed his approaching nuptials with dismay; he was far removed from the attitude of an impatient lover. He foresaw, in the many and varied preparations, an endless vista of constraint and tiresome ceremony.

A greater contrast than that presented by the Prince with the elegant girl beside him can hardly be imagined. The ages of the pair, alone, were similar, he being not quite sixteen years old, she rather more than a year younger, both mere children, the bridegroom bashful and backward, the bride, on the contrary, precociously mature. All contemporary accounts are unanimous in proclaiming the charms of Marie Antoinette, even though she then was at what is called the "awkward age." She was not thin, but slightly formed, with a remarkably graceful figure and carriage. Of average height, she was to grow steadily until her nineteenth year. Her feet, her hands and her neck were beautiful. Her features were not precisely regular, but the rather long, oval face was charming. Her high, broad brow

was crowned by a quantity of flaxen hair worn with a slight sprinkling of powder. Her delicate nose was slightly aquiline, her tiny, rosy mouth displayed the prominent Austrian under-lip. She had rather prominent bright blue eyes. Her dazzlingly fair skin with its lovely natural bloom needed no artificial aid. She carried her little head high, and this trick, together with the expression of her mouth, might have given her a disdainful air but for her gracious manner and evident desire to please. Her smile was irresistible and her voice equally delightful, being clear, musical and sweet. A slight Austrian accent, which she soon lost, did not at all detract from its charm. Her every gesture was graceful. Horace Walpole wrote of her : " When she moves, she is grace personified. They say she does not dance in time; then, the time is wrong."

Unfortunately, Marie Antoinette and her consort were also temperamentally unsuited to each other. Her general knowledge was limited, but she was quick to understand and assimilate. Her conversation was far from brilliant, she made no eloquent or striking remarks but, on the other hand, she was full of tact and delicate intuition, and was always ready to hit on the suitable phrase and say the right thing —a more useful attribute in a Princess than any sparkling sallies of wit. She certainly was far from learned. Her modest stock of accomplishments consisted of the rudiments of Latin, history, geography, and rather less than the rudiments of Italian. Her French was on the whole pretty correct, with the exception of a few provincialisms, which, according to flattering accounts, gave " adorable energy and point " to her speech. She was fond of music but a very poor performer, and she disliked any kind of serious literature. In short, her acquirements appear to have been essentially superficial. However, she contrived to make good use of her modest attainments.

True daughter of Eve as she was, her tact and charm stood her in good stead. She was warm-hearted, straightforward and absolutely honest. Her brother Joseph said of her that she always endeavoured to be truthful, that she was very amiable, very young, and rather frivolous, as was natural, but innately honest and virtuous. He qualified his praise by adding that "her giddy little head is constantly occupied in seeking pleasures and dissipations, all certainly of a perfectly reputable kind." True it is that her good intentions were too often sacrificed to an insatiable love of pleasure, which caused her to throw her duty and her own interests alike to the winds, in order to enjoy the passing whim of the moment. Hence the accusations of caprice and changeableness which were flung at her; hence, too, the hatred and jealousy of which she later became the object. For the moment, however, she was guilty of nothing worse than the foolish habit of laughing at those whom she disliked and mocking at their physical defects. In fact she was a spoilt child, and as a contemporary writer puts it, sometimes "a badly-behaved child."

Such were the two young creatures who on 13th May 1770 met at Compiègne for the first time. After a day of much needed rest, they proceeded in state to La Muette, halting on the way at St Denis in order to visit Madame Louise, the King's youngest daughter, who was a Carmelite nun. A grand banquet was held in the evening, and the royal family was transfixed with amazement when the Comtesse du Barry, who had never before appeared on such an occasion, was perceived among the invited guests. Would she take part in the marriage ceremonies? The Court had been on the tiptoe of expectation for some time, and she, herself, had been kept in ignorance, but, records the Duc de Croy, she was prepared in any case, for she had ordered a quantity of exquisite toilettes. It would

have been quite too disappointing not to wear them, so Louis XV was kind, and Mercy Argenteau was deeply shocked. "It is hardly to be believed," he wrote to M. de Kaunitz, "that the King should have chosen this occasion to grant the favourite an honour which had been hitherto refused her."

What were Marie Antoinette's sentiments regarding the curious incident? It is difficult to say. A few weeks later, in writing to her mother, she refers to the Du Barry as a "silly, impertinent creature," but on this particular occasion when one of her ladies asked maliciously what she thought of the notorious Countess, she merely replied amiably that she was "charming." It was whispered at Court that the young Princess had innocently inquired what the lady's occupation with the King might be, and when told that she was merely required to amuse and please His Majesty: "Ah! then I will be her rival," was Marie Antoinette's gay rejoinder.

The 16th May dawned radiantly for the journey to Versailles. On arriving at the palace the Dauphine donned her bridal robe of white brocade with enormous paniers. At one o'clock the Dauphin (very ill at ease in his gorgeous coat worked with gold thread and studded with brilliants), appeared to escort the bride. They proceeded to the chapel, where the marriage was blessed by the Archbishop of Rheims. During the ensuing reception a tremendous storm burst. All illuminations and fireworks had to be abandoned, and the assembled, gaping crowds fled in disorder. In the evening, after supper, the King with the royal family and the principal courtiers conducted the newly-married pair to their apartment. The Archbishop blessed the nuptial couch, and the King handed the night-gear to the Dauphin, whose bored and indifferent attitude during these traditional ceremonies was only too apparent. Then the bowing, curtsying crowd

retired, and the bridal pair were at last alone. If a gossiping chronicler is to be trusted, Louis XV, two hours earlier in the evening, had smilingly whispered to his grandson as they took their places at the supper table: "Don't eat too much to-night!" to which remark the Dauphin replied: "But why?—I always sleep better after a good meal." It is to be supposed that he *did* sleep soundly on his wedding-night, for next day, in the diary, in which since his thirteenth year he had carefully noted down all the important doings of the previous day, he wrote the one word, "Nothing." For seven long years from this date he might with truth have written "nothing" every day. Later on, it will be needful to enlarge a little on this delicate subject, which is of such vital importance to any who are attempting a critical study of Marie Antoinette. At present it suffices to note the sad surprise of the young bride at the extraordinary indifference which was publicly shown her. Indeed, the Dauphin scarcely spoke to her. In the morning he would enter her room to ask indifferently if she had slept, if she felt well, and then immediately hurry away, and only reappear at meal-times. In fact, two days after the marriage she actually dined alone, for the Prince was out hunting. "He is off very soon," remarked the Duc de Croy, all accustomed as he was to the vagaries of high life. Mercy wrote that "the Dauphin has no consideration whatever for his wife," and the Abbé de Vermond was distressed for his dear Archduchess. "Whilst I was with her this morning M. le Dauphin entered. I retired, and M. le Dauphin observed: 'Have you slept well?' 'Yes.' Then he went out. Madame la Dauphine pretended to play with her little dog which, in truth, amused her for a few moments, but she was soon deep in sad reflection. I am grieved to the heart for her!" The splendour of the ceremonies in honour of the marriage

could not altogether make up for this rather melancholy beginning ; still, they were on a very grand scale. In spite of the general poverty and the low state of the exchequer, the King determined to impress his allies by his magnificence. " Whatever happens in France, appearances must be kept up," declared a contemporary writer, and accordingly the King ordered nine consecutive days of rejoicings, the cost of which amounted to more than nine million francs. When all was over, Louis was foolish enough to ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he thought of the rejoicings at Versailles : " Sire," was the reply, " I think they are ' impayables ' ! "

The finale of the rejoicings was the fatal day of the 30th May, and was arranged by the city of Paris. I will not dwell on the only too-well-known catastrophe which occurred during the fireworks display in the Tuileries Gardens ; on the sudden panic among the 100,000 spectators, who were packed in the Place Louis XV; on the innumerable unfortunates who were trampled down and crushed to death in the dark; on the utter dismay felt for days in all classes of Parisian Society. It was said at first that 6000 persons had perished ; later on it transpired that only 132 corpses were actually found, 900 wounded having been taken to hospital.

It had been intended that the Dauphine should that evening enter Paris for the first time. She started with Mesdames, the King's daughters, and as they drove along by the Seine, they admired the distant rockets as they rose in the sky. On reaching the Cours-la-Reine they met hurrying, weeping crowds, and learned what had happened. The horses' heads were turned and the horrified ladies were driven back to Versailles. It was the Dauphine's first sight of the great city of Paris ; she was not to enter it again for more than three years.

The earthquake at Lisbon on the day of her birth, the disaster of the Place Louis XV at the very outset of her married life, are strange and tragic events. It is all very well to decry superstition and to mock at the warnings of fate, but I defy anyone faced with such a terrible prologue not to pause and reflect when considering the ultimate end.

CHAPTER II

THE DAUPHINE

It is an accepted notion that the first few days of married life are all *couleur de rose*. Clouds may indeed arise in the distant future, but at the outset all is fair and serene during the happy period known as "the honeymoon." With the childish pair whose union had just been sealed in the chapel at Versailles, however, the first days were the most difficult. The fault lay with the Dauphin, who was bored, uncomfortable and ill at ease with his youthful bride. To put it plainly, he was in a sulky humour and made no attempt to hide his feelings. His attitude was common gossip at Versailles. Ten days after the marriage, in a melancholy letter to Kaunitz, Mercy observes that "M. le Dauphin, who had just before the wedding appeared to be becoming more like other people, is now relapsing into his old uncouth habits. Every night, after supper, the Prince would come to his wife's apartment, throw himself on a sofa and doze there till about nine o'clock, when he would rouse himself and go off to bed, without having spoken a single word to Marie Antoinette. He was equally silent and sulky on rising in the morning. He cared for nothing but the chase which, according to du Croy, was not to him a mere relaxation but a highly complicated game, and his whole day was occupied in laboriously learning how best to play it.

Marie Antoinette's attitude during the difficult time was altogether praiseworthy. She was untiringly patient and gentle. Was she laying to heart the

advice contained in her mother's letter which had been handed to her a few days after leaving home: "A wife must obey her husband and only seek his pleasure, everything depends on the wife, who must be obliging, gentle and amusing?" We think not. Her admirable behaviour was most probably the result of her light-hearted disposition combined with girlish, innocent coquetry. In any case, she met the Dauphin's sulky temper with the sweetest grace and patience and was very soon rewarded. Little by little she softened and civilised the loutish boy; he began to appreciate the society of his charming bride, and at the end of a month he actually confided to his oldest aunt, Madame Adelaide, that his "consort was very charming," and that he "liked her face and her society." "In short," he adds, "I am very satisfied." But he kept his satisfaction to himself. Outwardly he was to all appearance as cold as ever. Time went on, and by July the 9th the Dauphine was able to write as follows to her mother: "My dear husband is really very much altered and all for the better. He is very kind to me and is even beginning to confide in me." Shortly after this, when Marie Antoinette one day remarked that as they were to live together, they ought to mutually confide in each other, Louis, for the first time, threw aside his sullen reserve and opened his heart to her. He talked of the Court and of many things which he said he had observed and known for long, but of which he had never before "spoken to any living soul"; he expressed himself freely as to the private life of Louis XV, his association with the Du Barry, the political intrigues of Choiseul and the underhand dealings of M. d'Aiguillon. Marie Antoinette listened and frankly gave her opinions in return. The ice was broken, relations became cordial, and one fine day the Dauphin actually dared to kiss his wife. "They say," writes Marie Antoinette

to her mother, "that he embraced me in public: that is not true, but dear Mamma, it is a very great mistake to imagine that he has never kissed me since my arrival."

This was all very well, but the Empress was by no means altogether satisfied. She naturally was concerned about the succession, the outlook concerning which was most unpromising. Indeed, the curious indifference of the first few days of married life continued as an established fact. The Dauphin liked his consort, was happy in her society, he even apparently admired her greatly; he was everything but a husband, a most amazing circumstance for those acquainted with the precocity of the Bourbons, who knew of the great King's youthful affection for Madame de Beauvais and remembered how Louis XV, married at sixteen, was the proud father of twin girls nine months afterwards. For several years Maria Theresa gives vent to her vexation at her son-in-law's coldness and indifference, and the Dauphine herself frequently bemoans the humiliating and vexatious state of affairs. She was even courageous enough once or twice to broach the matter to her husband, as when Mercy in his letter of 14th July 1770 remarks: "M. le Dauphin and Mme la Dauphine have been having a very lively discussion. I do not know all particulars, but finally M. le Dauphin told Madame l'Archiduchesse that at the commencement of their union he had thought out a plan which he had not meant to depart from, but that by now his views had altered and that he fully intended on reaching Compiègne to behave in all respects as befitting a husband." Unfortunately, the visit to Compiègne had no good effect on the strained relations of the bridal pair. Three months later, at Fontainebleau, the Dauphin appeared to be on the point of becoming less obdurate. Marie Antoinette, however, imprudently mentioned

her hopes to Mesdames, and they tactlessly congratulated their nephew on his change of attitude, whereupon he at once sulkily retreated into his shell. So, from month to month, year in, year out, the absurd and unfortunate state of matters continued. The Court whispered and tittered; Louis XV finally was openly amused. On the 16th November 1771, according to Mercy Argenteau: "The King in the family circle observed laughingly that any hopes of the succession lay with Monsieur d'Artois. The Dauphin in response muttered to Madame Victoire: '*The King has a poor opinion of me: some day he will find out that he is mistaken.*'" Marie Antoinette's sensations as she listened to these pleasantries may be better imagined than described, and to the annoyance of her position as a neglected wife was added the bitter reflection that she was unlikely to become a mother. Occasionally, in spite of herself, she could not conceal her chagrin, as when an officious maid of honour begging her to be careful of her health and give up riding: "Mademoiselle," she cried impatiently, "for God's sake, leave me alone. I assure you that I am not endangering the life of an heir-presumptive!"

Many reasons have been suggested in explanation of the curious situation, the true cause of which probably lay in the fact that the Dauphin was immature and, moreover, more or less afraid of the witty, graceful child on whom he had first set eyes so shortly before his marriage. He knew, too, that he was the observed of all observers, and the reproaches and vexation of his wife made him the more awkward and unhappy. It must be remembered that all through their married life Louis was always more or less embarrassed in Marie Antoinette's society—never wholly at ease with her. More than once this fact will be very apparent, and certainly at this critical moment the mutual misunderstanding was so serious that it continued for

years, and was only finally removed by the intervention of a tactful third party.

The Empress in due time became aware that this would be necessary, and wrote to Mercy that she hoped everything from the approaching visit of her son, the Emperor Joseph, to Versailles.

This delicate subject would be better left alone, were it not the true explanation of many of the mistakes made by Marie Antoinette at this period of her career ; mistakes such as the disdainful coldness, the contemptuous indifference she sometimes showed towards her boorish husband and her transparent pretence of living her own life and of being wrapped up in her various friends. She was accused of coldness towards her consort. "Do you really and truly love me?" the Dauphin inquired one day. "Oh, yes," she replied, "I have a great affection for you, as you well know—moreover, I sincerely respect you." Could a warmer response have been expected from a woman whose innermost feelings were daily so deeply wounded? The Dauphin, moreover, understood her attitude very well, and was both apologetic and embarrassed. Here we find the explanation of the extreme indulgence which in after years he evinced towards Marie Antoinette's every whim and fancy ; the explanation of his complete subservience to all her wishes and his anxiety to appease her very natural irritability. By giving in to her in everything he trusted to make her forgive his coldness towards her.

Maria Theresa had, on her daughter's departure for Versailles, most particularly exhorted her to try and find favour with the King, to gain his affection and to regard him as an unfailing support, all inexperienced as she was. "He will be a loving father to you, a friend as well, if only you are deserving. Be affectionate and submissive, try always to do as he wishes." The Empress's usual clear-sightedness was

in this case entirely at fault. The selfish, cynical, indolent Louis XV was not the man to direct a youthful Princess and complete her education. He had not troubled himself in the least about the welfare of his own daughters. "He never," writes a contemporary, "on any single occasion advised or reproved Mesdames, even when they were children." It was thus not very likely that he was prepared to trouble himself as to the welfare of the youthful stranger at his Court. He received her charmingly, it is true, because his manners were always irreproachable, and moreover, she was pretty and attractive. His attitude towards her was quite kindly. Sometimes, when returning from the chase, he would take her into his coach and let her sit on his knee and caress her. Soon, however, the easy ways of the little Archduchess rather grated upon the fastidious old King, who, rake though he was, never for a moment dispensed with courtly etiquette. "She is somewhat noisy and childish," he complained one day to Mercy, adding, however, "after all, it is but natural at her age." On the whole, he did not dislike her, and would sometimes observe her with an amused smile. But that was the extent of any kindness he showed her; he would not put himself out in the smallest degree on her account, nor let her interfere in any of his accustomed habits. He would not allow her to express an opinion or a wish on any subject other than the merest frivolities. Eighteen months after her marriage a new lady-in-waiting was to be appointed, and the Dauphine was much perturbed at the thought of the advent of a stranger. She summoned up courage to approach the King. "Papa," she said coaxingly, "pray let me have one of my own ladies." "Certainly not," was the stern reply; "and I expect that you will respectfully receive the lady I send you." His choice fell on Madame de Cossé, the daughter of

the Duc de Nivernais, a charming person in every sense of the word, and the Dauphine probably became quite reconciled to the King's choice, but she never again asked a favour from him. She was ill at ease with him, almost afraid to reply if he spoke to her, and if it became absolutely necessary to approach His Majesty on any subject she would insist on writing rather than make a personal appeal. Her mother's letters and the vigorous representations of Mercy Argenteau and the Abbé Vermond were powerless to overcome her timidity.

To whom, then, in these unfamiliar surroundings could she turn for advice and help? The Comte de Paris and the Comte d'Artois, her husband's brothers, were too young and inexperienced to afford her any assistance. The elder of the two was a big, sulky boy; the younger a mere child, very spoilt and noisy, a "regular rogue," according to Marie Antoinette. Both lads, moreover, were extremely jealous of the Dauphin, and the three Princes were for ever squabbling among themselves; in fact they frequently came to actual blows, and Marie Antoinette, in great alarm, would vainly endeavour to separate the combatants. There remained Mesdames, the unmarried daughters of Louis XV, and it is evident that these ladies, for a time, played a very important part in the life of their young niece by marriage. There were three Princesses, Madame Adelaide, Madame Victoire and Madame Sophie, living at Court; the youngest of the King's daughters, Madame Louise, was, as has been already stated, a Carmelite nun. The eldest of the group of sisters was barely forty years of age, but all were singularly "old-maidish," to use a hackneyed phrase—hard, narrow-minded, and mean. The two younger ladies were mere nonentities, though Madame Victoire had been a lovely girl, and even yet possessed sweet eyes and a charming smile; poor

Madame Sophie, on the other hand, was excessively plain and so shy and nervous that she hardly ever opened her lips. Both were completely dominated by their formidable eldest sister, faithfully echoing all her sayings and following her lead. Madame Adelaide was energetic, ambitious and fairly intelligent. Handsome in her first youth, she had aged rapidly and was now a tall, commanding woman with a rather prominent nose and a very overbearing manner. Her voice was harsh and unmusical, her conversation abrupt and disjointed. She was absurdly proud of her Royal rank, full of prejudices, strict regarding the most intricate forms of etiquette, imperious and ill-tempered.

During the Dauphin's childhood, she had been kind to her lonely little nephew, he, therefore, felt gratefully towards her ; he also respected her and was more than a little in awe of her.

Traditionally inimical to the House of Hapsburg, Madame Adelaide had openly opposed the young Prince's marriage, and when M. Campan, on the eve of starting for Strasbourg to meet the Archduchess, came deferentially to ask her commands, she said bitterly : " Were I in a position to command, I would send no one to meet an Austrian Princess." Her opinions were common property at Court, thus surprise was general when Madame Adelaide and her obedient sisters received their new niece with every mark of pleasure, openly petting her and having her constantly with them. They finally handed her a key to their suite of apartments, thus enabling her to visit them unobserved and unescorted, whenever she wished to do so. This sudden change of attitude is distinctly suspicious. Doubtless Madame Adelaide counted on gaining complete ascendancy over the inexperienced, impulsive girl, upon whom she tried to impress all her own ideas and prejudices, hoping thus to acquire

in the years to come, by means of the Queen consort, the power and influence which she had for so long desired and which, hitherto, had always been beyond her reach.

Just at first her plans seemed to be going well. As early as July, 1770, Mercy observed with regret the increasing intimacy of the Dauphine with her aunts, who tried to associate her with all their tiresome little intrigues. He very soon openly lamented the unfortunate consequences of the intimacy ; the foolish, indiscreet whispers about the King and his immediate circle, whispers which finally penetrated to His Majesty together with an inclination on the Dauphine's part to strike out a line of her own by withdrawing from Court and looking askance on those whom the King delighted to honour ; a tendency, in short, to take up a critical attitude and to silently oppose the royal pleasure. Mercy Argenteau appealed to the Empress who, greatly alarmed, wrote as follows to her daughter : " All the letters tell me that you are led completely by your Aunts. They have never been favourites either in their family circle or with the Public and *you* are actually by way of imitating them! They have always been tiresome, quarrelsome and odious with each other and ready for mischievous plots and gossip. I love you too much to be silent when I see you following their example." That those wise remonstrances were all in vain is not altogether surprising when youthful folly is taken into consideration. Time and experience were needed to open the eyes of the Dauphine.

After two years of blind submission her natural good sense triumphed and she became aware of her danger. Her pride, moreover, was hurt by the overbearing manners which Madame Adelaide, by now too sure of her own ascendancy over her niece, was at no pains to soften. Marie Antoinette began to dislike

the elder lady's superior airs and one fine day she opened her heart to Mercy Argenteau : " When I arrived in this country I was too young, too rash. I gave in to my aunts and they have made me do very many foolish things. Now, however, I know how to assert myself! " She did, in effect, completely and absolutely free herself from their influence, but unfortunately too late to regain the King's good opinion and retrace all her false steps. Her emancipation was so complete that the indignation of Mesdames, confronted with such a sudden change of attitude, soon became vindictive dislike. They never forgave her and the unhappy results of their bitter spite will be all too evident in the future.

It is clear that no one of the immediate family circle was in the least likely to bestow kindly advice on Marie Antoinette or to afford her any sort of protection. Was the prospect among her attendants, of whom the principal lady-in-waiting was the Comtesse de Noailles, more hopeful? Louis XV, in selecting the lady for this important position, had intended that she should serve as governess, as tutor, as a kind of female mentor to the Dauphine, and in some ways his choice was a very wise one. " Madame Honesta," for so she was nicknamed at Court, was indeed " grande dame," virtuous, kindly, and quite incapable of teaching the young Princess anything but good, moreover, she could be depended on to guide her household with dignity and decorum ; unfortunately she was neither good-looking nor broad-minded and her manners were stiff and peculiar. The Dauphine had a great respect for her, but she never really liked her. The young Princess, accustomed hitherto to an extremely simple life, was often openly impatient of the imposing stateliness and rigorous etiquette which prevailed at Versailles. She at once declared that her name for Madame de Noailles should be " Madame

Etiquette," and initiated an endless series of foolish tricks and jokes which are fully described in contemporary memoirs and of which the lady-in-waiting was the victim even after the Dauphine had become Queen consort. One day, to give an example of these pleasantries, Marie Antoinette, who was amusing herself by riding a donkey, fell off and at first laughingly declined assistance, but then cried : " Quick, fetch Madame Etiquette, she will know the correct procedure to be observed when the Queen of France is thrown by an ass! " True it is that there was no great harm in this childish nonsense, which, however, ended by spoiling what might have been a great influence for good. Madame de Noailles, vexed and discouraged by the failure of all her efforts to please Marie Antoinette soon gave up trying to win her affection and contented herself with fulfilling the purely official duties of her office. Even in this limited capacity she did good service, as was only too apparent when at last she retired to be replaced by the Princesse de Lamballe. With the new régime the Court doubtless gained in ease and gaiety, but it lost in dignity. Royalty in France was upheld by venerable tradition and ever since the time of Louis XIV the monarch had posed as a kind of Divinity, veiled from mortal eyes and inaccessible to the common herd. To penetrate the veil was dangerous ; an idol seen too near at hand is easily overthrown.

The only serious and lasting influence to which Marie Antoinette was subjected during this first period was that of Mercy Argenteau, the Austrian Ambassador. Towards the end of her life, in recalling old memories one day with the Duchesse de Tourzel, the Queen observed : " My mother advised me to place full confidence in M. le Comte de Mercy when I first arrived in France. *He knows France well, he has been Ambassador for years* were her words. *He*

will be certain to give you advice likely to make you a success in the land over which you are destined to be Queen. Attend to his counsels as though they were my own. I was but fourteen years old ; I loved and respected my mother ; I trusted M. de Mercy in all things. I looked on him as a father."

Florimonde Claude de Mercy Argenteau was at the time of the royal marriage, which he had helped on to the best of his ability, about forty-three years of age. He was a diplomat educated in the school of Kaunitz from whom he had learnt the ways and manners of Court life as well as the secrets of his profession. He was sensible rather than brilliant, calm, matter-of-fact, and untiringly industrious. In manner he was somewhat grave and formal and distantly courteous. His private life was eminently correct and he was even-tempered ; in short, Mercy may be described as being an excellent individual without a touch of actual genius. His appearance accorded with his character, for he was tall, thin and distinguished-looking. He dressed well, his features were regular, his manners cold and impassive.

Was he in all respects worthy of the implicit trust placed in him by the Dauphine? Certainly he was as regards his almost passionate devotion to her and to her mother the Empress, as regards his far-sighted outlook and his sincerity and frankness of speech. But anxious as he was to further the happiness of his fair, young Princess, he never for a moment forgot—and one can hardly blame him—that he was the Ambassador of Austria and that his country's welfare took precedence of all else. His unending watchfulness over every action and speech of Marie Antoinette was doubtless prompted by his desire of worthily fulfilling his duties as her guardian, but it was also and more particularly due to his determination to coach his pupil in the part that she was intended to play, the part

assigned her by her mother in marrying her to the Dauphin, the part of fostering the alliance and vigorously upholding the imperial policy.

For this reason Mercy Argenteau's injunctions, excellent when applied to details of conduct and daily life, are less satisfactory where public matters are concerned. For this reason no single individual in Marie Antoinette's immediate circle is at once so useful to her and so capable of doing her an infinite amount of harm. We have a minute account of the strict surveillance exercised by Mercy over his charge in a letter which he himself writes to the Empress. "I am sure of three persons in the personal service of the Archduchess, one of her women and two pages, and they inform me of all that goes on in the private apartments. Every day her conversations with the Abbé de Vermond, from whom she hides nothing, are reported to me. The Marquise de Durfort retails every scrap of gossip that is talked with Mesdames and I have means of knowing all that takes place when the Dauphine visits the King. I am, moreover, constantly on the look-out on my own account, and I can truthfully say that I am pretty well aware of what the Archduchess may be saying, doing or hearing at any given hour of the day." Mercy's "spying" —there is really no other suitable word—supplies the most intimate details. He knows all about the Dauphine's health and toilette ; he is vexed when she has eaten too much supper and adds that she declines to be laced tightly and that, alas! she sometimes forgets to brush her teeth! Every trifling act and gesture is carefully noted in his daily despatches to the imperial Court. Maria Theresa, far away in her palace at Vienna, knows more about her daughter's daily life than do those who are intimately acquainted with her at Versailles. These minute details, apparently so inoffensive, are productive of highly unfortunate

results. Things looked at from afar lose their true proportions, the written word becomes unduly important, and Maria Theresa, spurred on by Mercy Argenteau, begins in all good faith, to exaggerate Marie Antoinette's girlish faults and escapades and proceeds to scrutinize all her little sayings and doings. Her letters to her daughter are lengthy epistles, full of advice and rebukes, the latter frequently very severe. The Empress and Mercy declare that the Dauphine is frivolous, lazy, careless, given to laughing at people and hurting their feelings by her talk and mocking whispers ; that she is not sufficiently civil to her own countrymen when they happen to visit Versailles ; she does not " behave as a true German should," her mother declares. Again, she is accused of being too familiar, of forgetting her royal rank. Mercy indignantly reports that she is fond of playing with the children of one of her bed-chamber women ; they are dirty, noisy children, he declares, they spoil her beautiful gowns, tear and break the furniture and make a terrible mess in her apartments. Upon which the Empress scolds her daughter roundly, blaming her severely for her " low tastes " and " her donkey rides with children and dogs." " You will end," the writer declares, "by becoming absolutely eccentric, and no one will love or esteem you!" Needless to say, there is gross exaggeration here. Vermond's letters, together with those of equally reliable witnesses give us an idea of the real state of affairs. It is true that at Versailles, as of old in Vienna, Marie Antoinette was frivolous and childish, impatient of etiquette and given to making imprudent jokes, she also was too apt to judge people by their outward appearance. According to La Marck, " A man's figure and a woman's face were what she looked at, and she laughed at any who were ugly or clumsy." Unfortunately, Royalty is frequently encouraged in any favourite

weakness and the intimate friends of our youthful Princess egged her on in her folly and often entertained her at the expense of others and introduced undesirable acquaintances into her presence.

Against these somewhat trivial faults must be placed various admirable qualities. The Dauphine is kind and compassionate to the unfortunate ; she is generous and warmhearted, honest and sincere, " ingenuous " according to Mercy Argenteau. As soon as she is convinced of wrong-doing, she repents and promises to mend her ways. " Day by day," says Vermond, " I admire her sweetness, her tractability." Any good results, however, are not enduring; she soon light-heartedly errs and repents all over again. In these days of her careless youth it is to be noted that she was most modest and circumspect in her behaviour ; one of her women tells of her that she " bathed clad in a long flannel gown and insisted that her maids should hold a sheet in front of her when they were assisting her out of the bath."

The Empress's persistent and frequently unjust reproaches had a very bad effect on the Dauphine, who began to imagine that her mother disliked her and that she would be " treated like a child till I am thirty years of age," she complained. In her replies to the letters from Vienna, her natural annoyance, which did away with any good result of her mother's counsels, is very apparent, veiled though it usually is by formal expressions of respect. Occasionally, indeed, she defends herself with some show of spirit, but more often she merely eludes awkward questions and her letters become daily more vague, shorter, less confidential. The Empress soon observes the difference, blames her daughter's coldness towards her and is increasingly uneasy.

Marie Antoinette, on her side, openly expressed her feelings of resentment to her intimate friends

and especially to Vermond. "See, M. l'Abbé," she indignantly exclaimed one day, showing him a letter of her mother's, "If that were seen here, what would be thought of me?" On another occasion she was reading to him from a long epistle in which the Empress upbraided her for her dislike of serious literature. "Good reading is more essential for you than for others," wrote the anxious parent, "for you have no love of either dancing, music or drawing." "She makes me out to be a sort of idiot," cried Marie Antoinette angrily, and "my charming Princess was much vexed" whispered the Abbé Vermond to Mercy.

In vain the Abbé and the Prince de Kaunitz endeavoured to pacify the Empress by assuring her that she was on the wrong track and that she would gain nothing by her incessant fault-finding. "I am convinced," suggested Vermond timidly, "that if Your Majesty would but look leniently on her extreme youth and get your daughter to consider you as a friend, the result would be most satisfactory." Meanwhile, Kaunitz, a highly practical statesman dared to dictate to his imperious sovereign, telling her plainly "not to waste time in scolding her daughter, for," he goes on, "it is quite useless and will only make her angry. Merely try and use her for the good of the Empire." Both men talked and wrote in vain. The Empress persisted in her denunciations and the Dauphine continued to be secretly rebellious.

It is curious that she never suspected the source of the secret information of which she was the victim. The Empress, after each rebuke, was always very careful to say that Mercy-Argenteau was in no way responsible for details concerning Marie Antoinette's behaviour, but that they were obtained through some mysterious secret agency. The Dauphine believed her mother implicitly and thus she lived in perpetual

mistrust of all around her. "Madame la Dauphine," writes Vermond, "does not feel that any paper belonging to her is safe. She is afraid of skeleton keys and fancies that her own keys are taken from her pockets at night. She is quite obsessed with these perhaps imaginary terrors."

The girl is perpetually spied upon, suspected, criticized, and yet the life she leads is as innocent and transparent as running water. We are acquainted with all the minute details of each day at the Court of Versailles, everything is done in public and if the long hours are not very usefully employed, at least there is nothing to hide in the ceremonious existence. The Dauphine rises at half-past nine, makes a preliminary toilette, says her prayers, partakes of breakfast and goes to her aunts' apartments where, at this hour, the King is usually to be found. At eleven o'clock her hair is dressed ; at half-past eleven the doors of her apartment are thrown open and before the assembled company she puts on her rouge and washes her hands, after which all the gentlemen retire, the ladies remain and the Princess is dressed for the day. At mid-day she hears Mass together with the Dauphin and about one o'clock the couple dine together before a crowd of the general public, which gets as near as possible to the table. The dinner only lasts about half an hour, for, as the Dauphin remarks, "we both eat so quickly." After dinner the Dauphine is able to retire to her private apartments. It is supposed to be the time for serious occupations, and she reads or writes letters. Sometimes she makes an attempt at sewing, but she says herself that she is anything but fond of her needle. "I am making a vest for the King ; it is dull work. I hope that with the Almighty's help it will one day be finished !" At three o'clock precisely, she goes once more to her aunts or occasionally there may be a walk in the park, or she may ride

or drive, always in State. At seven in the evening there is play in the King's apartment till nine o'clock, then supper with the Dauphin and the aunts. Afterwards the young Princess dozes on a sofa till about a quarter to eleven, at which hour the King usually appears for a short time. If he does not show himself, she goes to bed at eleven o'clock. Such is the daily and far from amusing routine of Court Life at Versailles.

The Dauphine might, by way of enlivening her monotonous existence, have tried to interest herself in political matters, were it not that now, as was the case in after years, politics to her signified merely political persons whom she and her personal friends either approved or disliked.

The secret ambition of Kaunitz, Mercy and the Empress was that Marie Antoinette, pending her husband's accession to the throne, should seriously interest herself in high politics and endeavour to perfect herself in the art of sovereignty, "for," as Mercy observed, "considering what M. le Dauphin is, it is more than likely that she will, in the future, play a very important part." Marie Antoinette, herself, was the chief difficulty in the carrying out of this plan. She disliked giving her mind seriously to any subject, and she had the greatest difficulty in fixing her attention on anything. At first she met all Mercy's entreaties with a sort of passive resistance. "He does so bother and tease me!" she would say plaintively, adding, however, with her pretty smile, "but I dare say that some day I may be quite good at politics!" Indeed her resistance was steadily borne down, it was impossible to stand up against those of her immediate entourage who were continually spurring her on to action. She was finally effectually roused by the fall of Choiseul, who from the very outset had completely won her heart by adroitly reminding her of

his own rôle regarding the alliance and by flattering her in every conceivable way. "I feel," he said to Mercy, well knowing that his words would be repeated, "the very greatest admiration for our young Princess. She is, indeed, extraordinary for her age. Pray assure her, at a convenient moment, that both in life and in death I am hers." A Princess of fifteen years was, as is natural, much gratified at such homage on the part of an elderly and renowned statesman. When, therefore, a few months later this friend of her House, who was also the chief instigator of her marriage and the promoter of the alliance, was publicly disgraced and dismissed the Court, she was stunned by the blow and very deeply offended. Choiseul's dismissal was, as all at Versailles were well aware, the work of Madame du Barry and the Duc d'Aiguillon. The favourite was triumphant and very soon d'Aiguillon filled Choiseul's place in the Royal Council. It was almost a foregone conclusion that the Dauphine should enlist in the opposite camp and the friends of Choiseul, as Moreau expressed it, began to look on her as their leader. Mesdames, at this period, all-powerful with their niece, added fuel to the flames and thus a long, secret, dangerous struggle was entered on at Court.

Armand de Viguerot-Duplessis, Duc d'Aiguillon, great grand-nephew of the Cardinal de Richelieu was far from being a contemptible opponent. Kaunitz, in a letter to Mercy, describes him very fairly. "He is witty," he writes, "he is also vindictive and cruel; he is a born intriguer, very clever, a great worker and an implacable enemy, but he is very faithful to his friends;" and the old Minister strongly advised the Dauphine to make herself agreeable to the new Minister. But prudence, alas! was never Marie Antoinette's strong point and she was therefore more influenced by the gossip of those around her than by the wise advice of the Austrian statesman. She was,

moreover, encouraged in her dislike of d'Aiguillon. Her aunts informed her that he had so far forgotten himself as to refer to her publicly as a flirt, and the Comte de Provence secretly handed her a pamphlet in which the Duc was depicted as a traitor of the deepest dye and in which the Dauphine was exhorted to "beware of the Monster." D'Aiguillon himself increased her antipathy towards him by complaining to Mercy Argenteau of the coldness which was shown him and the curt reception accorded to his advances, thus causing the Princess to incur rebukes which only exasperated her the more. Soon what was at first merely instinctive dislike grew into actual hatred and d'Aiguillon became and remained to the end her "bête noire." "She has a quite extraordinary horror of him," writes Mercy. When Madame Adelaide, alarmed at the result of her machinations, endeavoured to preach prudence, the Dauphine retorted drily: "I beg, Aunt, that you will not interfere in M. d'Aiguillon's affairs, for he is thoroughly bad." The result of this enmity which was fully reciprocated will appear later on.

The fury against d'Aiguillon rebounds on the woman who was of his party. Many reasons have been put forward in accounting for the extreme harshness of Marie Antoinette's attitude towards Madame du Barry, such as virgin purity confronted with the courtesan, the jealousy of a pretty woman who sees herself eclipsed at Court functions by a notorious rival, annoyance because the Favourite is reported to have laughingly referred to the "little blonde Austrian," finally, pride of race which disdains to conciliate an individual of the lower orders. All these reasons, doubtless, contribute something to the situation. But what the Dauphine really hates most in Madame du Barry is her pose of friend in office and declared patroness of the new Minister. This is the real, the

unforgivable injury. We have only to glance at the dates to perceive that it is after the fall of Choiseul that the Princess, hitherto quiescent, openly shows her enmity towards the Favourite and by so doing, displeases Louis XV and disobeys her mother. Up to now she has been merely somewhat contemptuously civil in her manner towards her grandfather's mistress. "She was on two occasions close to me," she writes to the Empress, "I did not exactly begin a conversation, but I spoke to her once or twice." All at once this polite tolerance gives place to cutting disdain and Marie Antoinette, henceforth, actually ignores the very existence of Madame du Barry, never addresses her, never even glances her way. The Favourite is both amazed and distressed. She was, according to the Duc de Croy, a kindly creature on the whole and far from spiteful, but being vain and silly she cannot swallow the almost daily occurring affront, and she complains loudly to all and sundry, to Mercy d'Argenteau, to d'Aiguillon. to the King himself. If the Dauphine will but address one word to her, one little word, she will, she declares, be satisfied. Accordingly, pressure is brought to bear on the Dauphine and all are on the tip-toe of expectation, wondering as to whether or no she will relent.

During August, 1771, a curious little scene takes place at Compiègne. Madame du Barry, drawing aside Mercy Argenteau, assures him of her great esteem for the Dauphine and implores the Ambassador's aid. The King himself approaches and warmly takes the Favourite's part. "Let her at least be treated fairly as all are who have the entreé," he says ; "moreover," adds His Majesty, "Madame la Dauphine must not follow the bad advice which is being given her." Mercy Argenteau hurries excitedly to Marie Antoinette and implores her to be more conciliatory in her attitude ; she listens without committing her-

self, but next day she informs Vermond that unless M. de Mercy absolutely insists, she will not yield. He *does* insist and she is at last prevailed upon to promise that, given a suitable occasion, she will recognise the existence of Madame du Barry. Mercy, carefully arranges time and place for the important occasion and at the appointed moment he is to be seen chatting with the Favourite. The Dauphine, smiling graciously, advances towards the Ambassador and the lady. She is quite close to them when Madame Adelaide, who is on the alert, suddenly exclaims loudly : " It is late, we must go! " and the Dauphine stops short, turns and goes out with her aunt without uttering a word. " The whole thing was spoilt," cries Mercy in despair.

The Empress was furious when she heard of the affair. She could not restrain her anger. " What! you make such a ridiculous fuss about saying a civil word about anything, dress, any trifle, what does it matter? You have allowed yourself to become such a slave that reason and duty have no longer any meaning for you! " and from henceforth the Dauphine was incessantly besought to " respect the King's wishes." You are his principal subject; you must set an example to the Court. Neither I myself nor anyone else would wish you to lower yourself, to be intimate, but a mere civil word, a glance, not to oblige the lady, but to please your grandfather, your Master, your benefactor! " . . . Kaunitz, too had his say: " It is really amazing," he remarked, " to hesitate between pleasing Mesdames and displeasing the King! " He dictated to the Dauphine a little speech, as follows, which she might profitably make to His Majesty : " My dear Papa, the Duc d'Aiguillon has told the Comte de Mercy that you have remarked with displeasure an appearance of dislike on my part towards certain members of your circle. Be graciously pleased

to inform me of what you would wish me to do and deign to be persuaded that you will in all things be implicitly obeyed."

This intense anxiety seems strange, but it is probably occasioned by political rather than domestic reasons and the weaknesses of an old man are really much less in question than the welfare of the House of Austria. Indeed, Mercy openly states that this is the case. "It is most important," he writes to Maria Theresa, "that Madame la Dauphine should be sufficiently gracious to Madame du Barry and so make it possible for me to use the woman as an influence with the King and his Ministers." The Empress is of the same opinion. "My daughter must cultivate the King's good graces. She must be civil to the favourite on account of the benefit which may be gained for us and both Courts, the Alliance, even, may depend on her behaviour." The Princess, however, still holds her ground, she even defies her mother. "If you were in a position," she writes, "to observe close at hand, as I do, all that goes on here, you would speedily be convinced that the woman and her clique would never be satisfied with one single word; if I begin, I shall never be able to stop."

After eighteen months of warfare, a truce is called. On New Year's Day, 1772, the Royal Family are, as usual, receiving the good wishes of the assembled Court and as the Favourite passes, Marie Antoinette, looking at her, says aloud and graciously: "There are a great many at Versailles to-day!" The Dauphine has recognised Madame du Barry! The excitement at Versailles is great. The Countess is enchanted, d'Aiguillon is profoundly touched, Louis XV affectionately embraces his daughter-in-law. Mesdames, alone, are annoyed and upset. Marie Antoinette repairs to Mercy: "I have done as you wish; here is M. le Dauphin to bear me witness." The Dauphin

smiles and seems pleased, but Marie Antoinette goes on : " I have spoken this once, but this is the end and the woman shall not hear my voice again." So the conflict begins once more. It is impossible to enter into all the ins and outs of the struggle, it is sufficient to state that the various combatants verbally come to blows, and Mercy is at his wit's end. On one occasion, as the Dauphine is returning from hearing Mass, she confides to him that she has prayed for guidance and that if only she were convinced that the Almighty desires her to speak she would do so. Mercy at once declares that the counsels of her august mother should be followed as the expression of the Divine Will and Marie Antoinette is apparently impressed. A few moments afterwards the Favourite passes with Madame d'Aiguillon, and the Dauphine says hurriedly to the latter, fixing her eyes, however, on Madame du Barry : " The weather is very bad, we shall not be able to walk out to-day." Thus far and no farther the inspiration from on High, and from this day forward Marie Antoinette never budges from her stubborn attitude. Taken as a whole, she comes off with the honours in the foolish squabble. She shows herself as more independent and resolute than is to be expected at her age. Her youthful courage is vaunted alike at Court and among the general public. She is hailed as the partisan of virtue and innocence against vice and scandal and she begins to be really popular.

The general enthusiasm was very evident on the day of her first entry with the Dauphin into Paris. Three years had passed since her marriage. She had lived at Versailles, at La Muette, at St Cloud, at the very portals of the great city, but she had never been permitted to enter it, except on one evening in spring, when with her husband, she had gone, masked, to the ball at the Opera.

It is well known that, dating from the days of the

Fronde, a distrust of Paris amounted to a tradition among the Bourbons. Louis XV very rarely entered the city, neither did the Royal ladies. "The late Queen, the late Dauphine and your aunts have never been there," wrote the Empress to Marie Antoinette. Formerly, the heir to the throne, accompanied by his consort, had, shortly after his marriage, always made a state entry into the capital. Vainly, hitherto, had the Dauphine enlarged upon this custom, inferring that she would much like to visit Paris. Her representations were always ignored and Mercy thought, apparently with reason, that it was feared that the youthful pair would be received with too great enthusiasm.

At length on May the 18th, 1773, the Princess plucked up her courage and appealed directly to the King, who, taken by surprise, graciously replied that she might fix a day for her state visit. At once the date was decided, and on the eighth of the month following, the Dauphin and Dauphine entered Paris. The joy and delight of the people passed all bounds. Shouts, clapping of hands, repeated cries of "Long live our Dauphine, how beautiful, how charming she is!" resounded in all the streets of the city. The crowd was almost mad aith delight, everything was perfect on this ever-to-be-remembered day. When the young Princess appeared on the balcony of the Tuileries she was almost terrified at the vast sea of heads before her. "Mon Dieu!" she murmured, "what a crowd!" —to which the Duc de Brissac responded gallantly: "Madame, with all due respect to M. le Dauphin, two hundred thousand lovers are before you!"

It was no exaggeration. Paris, for the moment, was in love with Marie Antoinette. She knew this and she was touched. "What I most felt," she wrote to her mother, "was the kindness, the eagerness of the poor people, who, in spite of the heavy taxes, seemed so delighted to see us. It is wonderful to be

able to gain popularity so cheaply, and how precious it is!"

On returning to Versailles, her tact suggested a remark calculated to dispel the sombre gloom of the King's jealous ill-temper. "Sire," she cried joyfully as she entered the Presence, "Your Majesty must be greatly loved in Paris, for all were so very kind to us!" Probably, according to Hardy the publisher, the crowd on that memorable day imagined that the gloomy barricades of pomp and etiquette, which had for so long divided prince and people, making the monarch a sort of Olympian divinity, were down at last.

After a second visit to Paris, a leading newspaper publishes the following: "Madame la Dauphine is encouraging her consort in excellent ways. A Prince who desires to be the father of his people cannot show himself too often to his family."

For the French nation, as yet so warmly attached to its ancient Royal House, so enamoured of grace, of youth, of beauty, which for over a century had had to put up with invisible Queens and plain, stiff Princesses, this lovely Dauphine, so elegant, so smiling, so radiant with youth and splendour was an image of Spring, a Spring full of flowers and of sweet promises. A dawn of better days to come, a future which will cause present miseries to be forgotten, this is the glowing vision evoked by the graceful bearer of the pretty title which is to be heard on all sides and which no lips pronounce without a smile, the title of "La Dauphine."

CHAPTER III

ACCESSION AND CORONATION

At the Trianon during the afternoon of the 27th of April, 1774 Louis XV suddenly became unwell. He shivered, was feverish and had a violent headache ; accordingly the next morning he returned to Versailles. Two days later the first symptoms of small-pox showed themselves, and almost at once the doctors declared that the case was hopeless. Mesdames courageously remained at their father's bedside, but the King gave express orders that the Dauphin, the heir to the throne, should keep away from any chance of infection. Marie Antoinette hesitated as to what she herself should do and finally consulted Mercy Argenteau, who suggested that she should offer to share in her aunts' vigil. The King and the Dauphin would both in all probability decline to allow her to do so ; she would thus show kindly feeling without running any great risk. She followed Mercy's advice and the result was what he had foreseen. The Dauphine with her husband accordingly retired to her apartments and there they remained closely secluded during the whole course of the King's fatal illness. They were joined by the two brothers of the Dauphin and their wives and Mercy Argenteau and the Abbé de Vermond had the *entrée*. No other person was admitted. The ever vigilant Mercy lost no time in urging the young Princess to take, as far as possible, the management of affairs into her own hands. " She ought to try and seize the reins of government," he wrote, " for M. le Dauphin will always act after a tentative, hesitating fashion,"

and he implored the Empress to back him up in pressing her daughter to do her best to dominate the man who on the morrow would be King of France.

Far otherwise, however, let us hasten to say, were Marie Antoinette's thoughts and desires at this moment. She was in deep distress at the thought of relentless death, so close at hand. She was full of pity for the sufferings, the agony of the old King ; the prospect of heavy responsibility appalled her. She crept close to the Dauphin, who, completely overcome, sat with bowed head muttering : " It seems like the end of the world," and affectionately endeavoured to cheer and console him. " She behaved like an angel," Mercy declared, and the Court and the public, generally, fully agreed with him. A fortnight slowly passed. At last, on May 10th, about three o'clock in the afternoon, a lighted candle placed in the window of the room next to the one in which the King lay dying, was suddenly extinguished. This had been arranged as the given signal that the end had come and in an instant a reverberating sound like thunder awoke the echoes in the palace, over which the silence of death had reigned so long. Hurrying footsteps were heard in Marie Antoinette's ante-room, the footsteps of the crowd of courtiers who quickly forsaking the threshold of the dead King, were rushing to salute the new monarch.

Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, overcome with emotion, fell on their knees, and raising their hands to Heaven exclaimed: " God help and protect us ; we are too young to reign! " The King tenderly embraced his wife, saying : " It is a terrible responsibility, but you will help me." The Comte de Provence, an eye-witness, has described the scene. " Merely an emotional outburst," he remarks, " but the Dauphine took it literally,a female sovereign was to her no novelty;

she had been well acquainted with one at the Court of her mother."

It is, however, probable, with all due deference to the able chronicler of the scene, that Marie Antoinette's sentiments at that solemn moment were far from being ambitious. Trembling convulsively, her handkerchief pressed to her eyes, she seemed almost unconscious of the homage of the assembled courtiers, and her tears and sobs could not be restrained. That same day, at six in the evening, the Court was moved to Choisy. The new reign, with its enormous responsibilities, its endless difficulties, had begun in earnest. Maria Theresa was very anxious. "I deeply regret," she wrote to one of the Archdukes," the extreme youth of the King and Queen—if only they had been six years older!" and again to Mercy: "The position of the King, the Ministers, the State, indeed, is anything but promising. My daughter is young, has never had any balance, never will have any. I fear her days of happiness are over."

Marie Antoinette, herself, however, had no such gloomy forebodings. Variable, emotional as she was, she had already forgotten the first impression of awe and dismay and was full of the brilliance of her new position, of her newly-acquired independence, of the delight of being a queen. In a letter to her mother, dated four days after the accession, she naïvely expatiated on her pleasure and her confident hopes for the future. "The new King appears to have gained the hearts of the people. He is unceasingly occupied, and replies with his own hands to those Ministers whom he cannot receive. He has a taste for economy and the most ardent desire to make his people happy!" and there follows a burst of youthful enthusiasm: "How admirable are the ways of Providence in chosing me, the youngest of your daughters, for the most splendid kingdom in Europe! More than ever do

I feel all that I owe to my august Mother who has taken such endless trouble to obtain for me this glorious inheritance!" Louis XVI himself added a few words—not quite so effusive in tone to this epistle. He "stands in great need," he says, "of any good advice the Empress may see fit to give him," and he thanks her for the gift of her daughter, with whom he assures her he is "absolutely content." The young Queen thinks this rather cold praise and gaily goes on: "My dear Mamma will perceive that, although he is truly fond of me, he is not much given to flattery!"

By all accounts the mutual understanding between the royal pair during these first days of the new reign was a happy one. Mesdames, the King's aunts, had been attacked by the small-pox and had left the Court, and with them went a fertile element of dissension. "The illness of Mesdames is a public benefit," declared Mercy openly, and all around echoed his sentiments.

At Choisy, and later, at La Muette, the young King and Queen lived quietly and simply, almost as though they had been a husband and wife of the middle classes. Every day, sometimes alone, sometimes with the other princes, they would take long walks in the Bois de Boulogne, without a guard, almost unescorted. Sometimes the Queen would amuse herself by driving one of the light, two-wheeled conveyances, recently invented and called cabriolets. Preceded by a single outrider, she would cleverly manipulate her equipage over the verdant countryside. Sometimes, when the weather was very warm, luncheon was served in the park; with the utmost simplicity, milk and strawberries were consumed and enjoyed in public, and the passers-by were enraptured at the idyllic scene. "How charming!" ecstatically exclaims a newspaper reporter," is the sight of this happy union, how preferable to all the mummery of Asiatic pomp!" The Duc de Croy tells a pretty story

of these early days. One Sunday in June, the Queen was riding in the Bois de Boulogne. The weather was glorious, there was a huge crowd and each and all, narrates Croy, were engaged in admiring the young Princess "full of grace and sweetly pretty." All at once she perceived the King, who was walking alone, unaccompanied by his guards. She stopped her horse, sprang to the ground, ran to her husband, who took her in his arms and kissed her. The delighted crowd applauded loudly, and the Bois rang with hurrahs and hand-clappings. "It was," says the good Croy, "the prettiest, most touching scene imaginable."

Sometimes roguish tricks are indulged in. Towards the close of the same month of June, Louis XVI, only just recovered from the inoculation ordered by the Faculty, is at work in his study, when a "grey sister" begs to be allowed to approach him. He kindly consents to see her for a few moments, whereupon a closely-veiled nun with downcast eyes, glides in: "Sire," she says timidly, "I am sent by my community to congratulate your Majesty on the happy results of the inoculation and to implore alms for our convent which is in dire distress." The King is already looking for his purse, when the nun suddenly bursts out laughing in his face. General consternation and murmurs of "a mad woman!" Louis XVI exclaims to the Captain of the Guard: "Arrest her but do not harm her!" The nun laughs more loudly and a gay young voice cries: "Does no one know me?" She throws back her veil and displays the radiant countenance, the sparkling eyes of Marie Antoinette. Sometimes these little incidents were really full of tact. The words addressed by the Queen to M. de Pontécoulant, Major-General of her bodyguard, with whom as Dauphine she had quarrelled, may be given as an example. She noticed him one day on duty at her coach door and said pleasantly:

"We have had some squabbles in the past, but I have forgotten your part in them and I hope that you will forget mine." She further declined to benefit by a tax called "*le droit de ceinture de la Reine*," * which it was customary to impose at an accession. "I won't have it," she declared, "girdles are not worn now." Her action and her clever little speech caused general delight.

Another praiseworthy innovation which transformed the Court was approved by all and sundry and consisted in the giving of little suppers over which the Queen herself presided. Formerly Louis XV had invited men only. The Princesses were excluded, and the results often were regrettable. Marie Antoinette inaugurated little intimate suppers, at which she was present with the King, and to which the Princes and Princesses of the Blood and a few intimate friends were invited. The elder courtiers murmured, Mesdames exclaimed aloud in dismay, but the Queen was determined and the new fashion prevailed to the great improvement of conjugal relations and decency, generally at Court.

The beginning of the reign is wholly delightful and Marie Antoinette appears at her very best. She is striving to overcome her faults and weaknesses and doing her very best to win the hearts of her subjects. "I will make as few mistakes as possible," she had remarked to Mercy Argenteau and she wrote to her mother: "I wish and hope to improve by degrees and, without ever meddling or intriguing, to become worthy of my dear husband's trust." She studies economy, her dress is simple, she endeavours to be less impulsive and manages occasionally to overcome her repugnance to any serious study or occupation. She is, moreover, more careful to please her husband, more indulgent to his failings, more alive to his good

* The tax of the Queen's girdle.

qualities. Louis XVI is touched by her sweetness and goodwill and is more gallant and attentive and less boorish in manner. When he presents her with the little Trianon for her own particular use and pleasure, he actually manages to make her a pretty speech, saying: "This place has ever been the dwelling of the King's Favourite, therefore it is yours by right." Marie Antoinette, delighted, acknowledges the gift by giving a grand dinner in her new demesne. The King and all the royal family are the guests. This second honeymoon seems much more promising than the first. The Queen is proud and happy and boasts light-heartedly to her mentor, the Austrian Ambassador, "Come!" she exclaims, "you must allow that I am improved in many ways!" She has, moreover, gained in her outer aspect. The slim, undeveloped maiden has changed greatly since her marriage. She has grown distinctly taller, her bust is full and round, her hands and arms are most perfectly shaped. She walks well, with ease and grace, generally rather quickly, but occasionally, as a spectator describes it, "she seems to swim and glide" in a quite enchanting manner, without however abating her dignity in the least. Indeed, this high dignity of mien which she maintained even in her most intimate moments is one of her chief attributes. She is ever the Queen of France, even when she is playing the part of a pretty woman. "No one ever curtsied with such grace," declares a courtier who knew her well;" she would salute ten persons at once with one great sweeping bend and recover, giving each individual a separate glance and smile the while."

She is also more sure of herself since the accession. She has an excellent memory and never forgets either names of faces, an excellent trait, this, in royalty, and as useful as good works. Her sweet temper and her genuine desire to please stand her in good stead.

Without much trouble she is able to make graceful little remarks which from such lips seem quite enchanting. Though not actually witty, she is easily amused and laughs gaily at any little jokes and even at gossip and slander if they are discreetly veiled and adroitly administered. Thus, by all around her she is considered to be highly intelligent, although it is observed that her manner stiffens in spite of herself if the talk tends to become too serious, when she at once endeavours to divert it into a lighter channel ; this little weakness is, however, charitably put down to her youth. She is now quite at home in the French language which she speaks with hardly a trace of foreign accent. Indeed, Vienna reproaches her with having forgotten all her German, accordingly she thinks she will try to regain fluency in her native tongue and essays some lessons with a German tutor, but she very soon tires and gives up the attempt.

At the time of the accession, Marie Antoinette, with all her gifts and graces, really seemed, her girlish faults notwithstanding, to have been specially created to be a popular French king's consort. Young, brilliant, she came after those sad, forsaken Queens, who during the two preceding reigns, had yawned their lives out behind the scenes and naturally, the changed aspect of affairs delighted the whole nation. "A more suitable choice could not have been made," cried a delighted contemporary. It is curious to reflect that her popularity is achieved by those very attributes which in years to come will cause her to be execrated by the populace. For the moment, however, all is serene. Wherever she appears and on all occasions she is greeted with transports of joy and unbounded enthusiasm. The Empress is not exaggerating when she writes as follows to her daughter : "All are ecstatic and quite mad about you two; the greatest good fortune is foretold, you are recreating a down-trodden

nation." Less partial observers at Court can only detect one, very pardonable, crime, which Time will rectify only too soon. "It is the reign of Youth," sighs Madame de Boufflers. "They think anyone over thirty years of age is in his dotage."

The dark shadows in the pleasing picture were contributed by the various members of the family circle, the brothers, the sisters-in-law, the aunts, and the greater part of the Princes and Princesses of the Blood. Never, at any period of time, or at any Court, could there have been found a more unpleasing set of relations. The elder of the King's brothers, Monsieur, the Comte de Provence, was at this date, extremely unlike the man, who, softened by age and misfortune, became in after years Louis XVIII. He was a year younger than the King and even more stout and heavy in appearance, but much more intelligent and witty. He was false, cunning and deceitful, and was capable of any mean action calculated to gratify his jealous ambition and vulgar greed. Marie Antoinette declares that "His intrigues to gain his own ends and get money would make any honest individual blush." Among the late King's papers at his death many letters from the Comte de Provence had been found and the contents of these private missives to his grandfather were absolutely different from what his public professions had been. His double dealing had become public property and Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were profoundly hurt and annoyed.

One evening *Tartuffe* was being performed by the princes before a strictly intimate circle, the title rôle being taken by Monsieur. At the close, "Splendidly played," said Louis XVI aloud; "the players being all so well suited to their parts!"

Marie Antoinette's dislike of the Comte de Provence was more discreet than her husband's, but equally intense. She was always more or less suspicious

of her dangerous brother-in-law and he, himself, many years afterwards, thus describes her attitude towards him. "For long on bad terms with her, her friend in later years, I was never really a favourite and though she *talked* to me a great deal, she never *consulted* me on any subject." This opinion is confirmed in the following note from the Queen to her Mother. "He thought he was going to be intimate with me and so by way of a beginning he wrote to me—this is his usual plan . . . the letter is fulsome, mean, false. But I thought it best to seem to believe all that he said, and so, ever since, we have appeared to be on the best of terms. I am sure, however, that this is merely a pretence on both sides."

It is to be regretted that she did not equally dislike and distrust the Comte d'Artois, her younger brother-in-law. He was certainly much more attractive in appearance than Monsieur, possessing as he did a light, graceful figure and a pleasant face, though, unfortunately, his mouth was almost invariably open, which gave him a somewhat foolish expression. His intelligence, however, was extremely limited, his judgment poor and his disposition quarrelsome. His cynicism and his profound ignorance were only equalled by his self-confidence and conceit. His talk was in shocking taste, consisting usually of stories of the demimonde and licentious gatherings. His knowledge of literature consisted in his having learnt by heart *La Pucelle*, portions of which he was fond of reciting aloud. His life was like his conversation, for he regularly passed his days and his nights in dissipation, he played high, he was forever in debt and the leader of a set of libertines and adventurers, who flattered him, sponged upon him and compromised his name in many disreputable ways.

In spite of all, however, he amused the Queen. He was exactly her own age; like her, he was fond of

Society and gaiety, and his amusing sayings and doings served to distract her mind from the endless Court etiquette and business of state. They were often to be seen together, either riding, driving or walking; laughing and whispering with each other. Mercy viewed this perfectly innocent intimacy with disfavour and the Empress accordingly took her daughter somewhat severely to task. Marie Antoinette, in return, defended herself vigorously, declaring that she knew well what she was about. "It is quite true," she wrote, "that the Comte d'Artois is wild and does not always behave as he should. But my dear Mama may be sure that I know how to stop any nonsense and far from being too familiar with him, I have more than once given him a very severe lesson."

This is all quite true. She knew in her heart what her brother-in-law really was, she was well aware of his faults and vices. She had no respect, no real affection for him. Once when the family had been living together for some time, she declared that if she had to choose a husband over again from among the three brothers, she would most certainly select the one Providence had already bestowed on her. Again, in 1776, when the Comte d'Artois was, for a time, seriously ill, everyone was surprised to observe Marie Antoinette's indifference, and she said frankly to Mercy Argenteau that she only cared for the Prince when he amused her, that he possessed no single quality which really appealed to her.

Still, it is a fact that, as a rule, she sought his company, that she permitted him to organize her parties and her fêtes, that she too often followed his lead and his advice and that her reputation suffered in consequence.

The first Prince of the Blood, the Duc de Chartres, in after years, the Duc d'Orleans, later still the notorious Philippe Egalité, scored over his cousins in the fact

that he was at least the declared enemy of the Queen. At first he had tried to win her favour by giving balls and hunting parties in her honour, hoping thus to gratify her love of pleasure. Nothing, however, availed to overcome the instinctive aversion she felt for the dissolute, cynical prince, who was concerned in the most dangerous plots in the kingdom. Some stinging remarks of the Queen which reached the ears of the Duc, the refusal of the coveted title of Grand Admiral of France, which refusal he thought he owed to her influence, the frequent taunts of his boon companions, all combined to make him speedily her undisguised adversary and the nominal chief of the faction hostile to Marie Antoinette, which constantly waged against her, a war of calumny, libel and defamation, dangerous indeed, but less harmful than were delicate insinuations and underhand attacks.

The women of the family indulged in the latter form of injury. We have seen what the Princes were like, the Princesses were not very much better. The Counts of Provence and d'Artois were married to two sisters, daughters of the King of Sardinia, and the royal House of France had gained but little by the acquisition of these two ladies. The elder, the Comtesse de Provence, who was plain, with a poor figure, had no redeeming qualities of mind, she was unsociable, jealous, crafty and sly. " She is a true ' Piémontaise,' " the Emperor Joseph II had said of her, and he had charitably proceeded to remark that her sister, the Comtesse d'Artois was " both ugly and stupid." No one appears to have offered to contest the Emperor's ungallant opinion.

Both sisters, as may be imagined, were acutely jealous of Marie Antoinette. They envied her alike as a woman and as princesses, and they rivalled each other in their furtive disparagement of her and of all her doings. The elder sister maliciously originated

venomous accusations, which the younger foolishly repeated in her French-Italian jargon, without half understanding what she was repeating. Sometimes they actually dared to brave the Queen to her face and refused to comply with the rules of etiquette. The Court chronicler describes a stormy scene, in which the Queen lost her patience altogether and complained to the Comte d'Artois of the manners of her sisters-in-law. "These ladies," she said "are not sufficiently respectful. They must remember that I am Queen, and moreover that I am of the House of Austria, which takes precedence of all others!" The Prince merely laughed and rejoined: "My little Sister is pleased to be witty! That is well, for it proves that her anger will not last long."

I need not again describe Mesdames, the King's aunts. Their already waning influence over Marie Antoinette vanished for ever at the accession, and the Queen was anxious that all should know that this was the case. "As for my aunts," she wrote proudly, "it can no longer be said that they influence me," and, to use her own expression, she missed no chance of putting down their little pretensions and boastings. They very soon relinquished the unequal struggle. They retired to the Castle of Bellevue, and they hardly ever appeared at Versailles. But they were filled with revengeful bitterness; at first they merely sharply criticized the toilettes, the new fashionable adornments, affected by their niece. When, for example, she started the mode of wearing high waving plumes in her hair, Mesdames mocked at this. "Ornament suitable for horses." Such trivial criticism however soon became something far more dangerous. All the details of Marie Antoinette's private life were commented upon and malignantly travestied at Bellevue and scandalous anecdotes which were whispered there penetrated to Paris. "What one Princess suggested,

the next would agree to and the third would declare the story to be fact," says a contemporary writer. The slanders and calumnies gradually became more and more dangerous and had disastrous consequences, and Mesdames at Bellevue were the first to bestow upon the Queen that fatal title which finally sealed her doom, the title of "*l'Autrichienne*" (The Austrian).

The two young sisters of the King, Mesdames Clotilde and Elizabeth, were almost negligible. The elder, who was very stout and nicknamed accordingly "le gros Madame" married a year after her brother's accession to the throne and departed to Turin. The younger, was a mere child, sweet, gentle, rather delicate and not very clever. "She is a dear girl," wrote Marie Antoinette, "and showed feelings deeper than her years would warrant at her sister's departure." In any case she was too young to be much of a resource to her sister-in-law, and the Queen, moreover, imagining, wrongly as it turned out, that the Princess would soon be married did not see any use in cultivating a friendship that would not be likely to endure. "I confess to my dear Mama, that I am afraid of getting too fond of her, for I know that for her own happiness, and by the example of my aunts, how important it is not to remain an old maid in this country," she wrote to Maria Theresa.

The Queen had around her, accordingly, seven near female relatives, seven princesses, and she could not count on a single one as a friend, indeed, they were nearly all her secret enemies. Seven princesses, and each possessing a numerous suite! More than a hundred women all told, according to the calculations of the Duc de Croy. The endless gossip, the everlasting intrigues, the pitfalls spread for the unwary, may be better imagined than described.

Among all this host of male and female relatives, there was not one who was of any real practical use to

Marie Antoinette, and worst of all, her husband was but her husband in name, kind, certainly, and indulgent, but ever fearful of her caresses, ever refusing to be her lover, to make her a happy mother. In a word, she was lonely, lonely in heart and in mind, lonely, though surrounded by a glittering crowd.

It is not surprising that she was overjoyed, when ten months after the accession, the visit of her young brother Maximilian was announced to her. He was then eighteen years old and was travelling in Europe with a tutor, to complete his education. He arrived at Versailles during the month of February 1775: he stayed three weeks and alas! his visit was far from being a success. He was stupid and narrow-minded and so awkward in manner, that his own mother said of him that he "looked like an idiot." The Archduke left a melancholy impression on the French public. His want of tact was criticised and people were never tired of laughing at his reply to Buffon, who had offered him a complete set of his works: "Oh, but I could not think of depriving you of them!" the Archduke had observed. He was popularly nicknamed the Arch-fool, and Marie Antoinette came in for her share of discredit, it was said that she ought not to have produced such an impossible brother.

The Archduke was travelling incognito as the Comte de Burgan. Accordingly, the Princes of the Blood, of Orleans, of Condé and of Conti declared that Maximilian must visit them before they went to him. This he haughtily declined to do and the Queen warmly took his part. "You know," she said to the Duc d'Orleans, "that the King has treated him as a brother and that he has supped in the private apartments with the Royal Family, an honour which you have never aspired to, I think; besides," she added, "my brother will be sorry not to see the Princes, but there are many things to do in Paris and his time is short, it does not

really matter." All this was hardly conciliatory. No one would give in, and the Archduke accordingly only met the two brothers of the King. The Comte de Provence arranged a grand fête at Versailles in honour of Maximilian, accordingly, on the same day, the Duc d'Orleans and the Condé princes showed themselves publicly in Paris. When the Comtesse de Cossé, the Queen's lady-in-waiting, gave a ball for Maximilian, she had to go to the princesses, whom she was forced by etiquette to invite, and tell them that if they put in an appearance, the Queen would stay away. All at Vienna were deeply annoyed and vexed. "The Queen," wrote Kaunitz, "should have kept out of the stupid affair and not have lost her temper."

The Archduke departed early in March, leaving a divided Royal Family, the King was displeased, Marie Antoinette was ill at ease. She wrote to her mother that her brother had made a good impression by his politeness and straightforwardness and civility to all, but she added that it was difficult to show him objects of interest, he was always so indifferent. She hoped, she said, that finally the squabbles of the Princes and all the tiresome gossip would soon die down. But she made the King forbid his cousins to appear at Court for some little time and by so doing, prolonged the general ill feeling. This apparently insignificant incident is the signal for the first falling-off of Marie Antoinette's popularity, and it is now, that in certain clubs in the city is heard for the first time the ribald song of which the following lines are the refrain :

Petite reine de vingt ans,
Vous qui traitez si mal les gens,
Vous repasserez la barrière,
Lonlaire, lonlaire, lonlaire.

The whole affair, would however speedily have been

forgotten, had it not been the immediate precursor of infinitely more serious happenings, such as the dismissal and exile of the Duc d'Aiguillon and various incidents which occurred at the coronation with grave and far-reaching consequences.

Marie Antoinette's dislike of the Duc d'Aiguillon, the Minister of War and of Foreign Affairs had, since the accession, become even more evident, more openly shown than in former days. "The Queen," remarked Mercy Argenteau, "forgets all her dislikes and grievances (as Dauphine) only the Duc and the Duchess d'Aiguillon are excluded from the scheme of universal benevolence. During the first Court reception of the reign it was remarked that the young Sovereign, smiling and gracious to all the other Court ladies, had not spoken a word to Madame d'Aiguillon, nay, had even seemed to glance at her from under lowered eyelids after a very disdainful fashion. The mortified Duchess left next day for her country seat of Veretz, and it was whispered that she had gone to make all ready for the reception of her dear husband."

The matter was rendered the more complicated owing to the Duke's connection with the King's Prime Minister, the old Comte de Maurepas, whose wife was Madame d'Aiguillon's aunt, and thus a desperate tussle for influence was entered on between the young Queen, strong in the King's affection and her ascendancy over him and the Mentor, the confidential friend, the guide and counsellor of her husband. A regular campaign began in May 1774, in which the Queen unceasingly importuned Louis to obtain the dismissal of the man whom she regarded as her enemy and defamer, whilst Maurepas and his wife did their best to defend their nephew or at any rate to defer his fall until the period of the general rearrangement of affairs. The King, ill at ease, and undecided, wavered between the two parties. Véri's

journal describes the unhappy Louis, listening wearily to Maurepas, who is expatiating on the talents of the Duc d'Aiguillon. "But of course I know he is clever and that is what makes me so angry," shouts the King, banging on the table with his clenched fist.

It was the Duke himself, who seeing the inevitable end, finally precipitated matters. During the afternoon of June 2nd, he attended the General Council and resigned his double portfolio. Louis XVI spoke no word to retain him. The Queen had won and on the whole, and so it was generally acknowledged, her victory was a justifiable one. She even relented, so far as not to insist on the customary exile. D'Aiguillon retained his commission of Captain of light infantry and so was able to appear at Court. This unusual concession, says the Duc de Croy, does honour to the Queen. Unfortunately, the Duke was of a revengeful disposition and was not in the least grateful for Marie Antoinette's forbearance and only conscious of his grievances. He took up his abode in Paris and there he lived, bitter, discontented, surrounded by a cabal, a group of nobodies, a centre of opposition to the new reign and especially to the Queen. Here, it is said originated those underhand attacks of which Marie Antoinette was the victim at this early stage, those poisoned darts, which were levelled at her as Queen and woman alike, wounding her to the quick and hurting both her pride and her dignity.

It is very certain that a plot against her existed, but it has never been proved that d'Aiguillon was its chief instigator and he, himself, always denied the fact. However, Marie Antoinette believed in his guilt, and dangerous counsellors encouraged her in her anger. Choiseul recalled from exile and installed for the winter in Paris, was surrounded by many friends and hangers-on who were eager to avenge his wrongs and see him restored to power. Their game consisted in constantly

fanning the flame of the Queen's anger against Choiseul's vanquished enemy, and it was speedily successful, the Baron de Besenval, who was high in favour with Marie Antoinette, himself relates his part in it as follows : " I put very strongly before her the danger she ran in allowing such a mischievous cabal with the Duc d'Aiguillon at its head to exist, anything might be anticipated on the part of a man of such a bad, revengeful and underhand disposition, I accordingly made her see the necessity of getting rid of him." The Baron candidly proceeds : " My duty to the Queen would in itself have sufficed to make me attack M. d'Aiguillon, but other considerations were also involved. He was the cause of M. de Choiseul's fall and I felt that punishment was due. There was no hope of recall for M. de Choiseul so long as any vestige of power remained with M. d'Aiguillon and in getting rid of him I felt I should be doing good service to my friends."

The Queen, thus spurred on, excited and irritated as well by the attacks which have been already referred to, never gave the King one moment's peace, until she had avenged herself. " The hair on my head rises when I see that man!" she exclaimed to one of her ladies-in-waiting. Open war was declared on May 31st 1775 at the review of the Household Troops. D'Aiguillon, at the head of his light infantry, was about to salute the Queen when she abruptly pulled down the carriage blind as he approached, leaving him amazed and indignant at this public insult. However, he put the best face possible on the situation and declared that he was making his preparations to attend the Sovereigns at the Coronation which had been arranged to take place during the following week. A few days later, on the eve of starting for Rheims, the Queen summoned Maurepas. " I have had cause," she said, " to be displeased with your

nephew for a long time. You have defended him and we have fought against each other. You have had your own ideas about it all, I have had mine, and they would not have pleased you. Let us remove your nephew to a distance and let us forget our mutual misunderstandings." Maurepas, taken aback, murmured a few vague words, but the Queen next day returned to the charge, she declared that d'Aiguillon must be forbidden to go to Rheims and that he must be exiled to his country seat. "It is full measure and running over, the vase must be broken," Marie Antoinette finally exclaimed. "But, Madame," objected Maurepas, "It seems to me that, if the King is to inflict an injury, yours should not be the hand employed as weapon." "You may be right, Monsieur, and I hope it may be for the last time, but this once I am determined." "May I then, Madame, say that it is done by your will and not by the King's?" "I consent," said the Queen, "I will take all responsibility."

Louis XVI, on being appealed to by Maurepas, confirmed all that his wife had said. He declared that he did not want to be mixed up in the affair and he left the Queen to settle the date and conditions of exile as she pleased. A third discussion took place between Maurepas and Marie Antoinette. He proposed that his nephew should be exiled to his country seat of Veretz near Tours. "It is too near," said the Queen, and insisted on the Chateau d'Aiguillon in Guienne. "Madame, what shall I write?" "Whatever you like, only he must go." Maurepas was obliged to fulfil his unpleasant commission instantly and the Queen, in her impatience, sent hourly messages to hasten the Duke's departure, which actually took place the next morning. Marie Antoinette's childish pleasure in her achievement appears in the following note to the Comte de Rosenberg, a friend of her girlhood,

in which she says: "The horrible man kept up all kinds of spyings and malicious plots. I didn't want a *lettre de cachet* but this is just as good, for instead of staying in Touraine as he hoped, he has been ordered to go to Aiguillon, which is in Gascony."

The sensation caused by this summary execution was far greater than had been anticipated. Those, even, who most disapproved of the Duc d'Aiguillon's behaviour, were horrified at such an arbitrary proceeding against possibly imaginary wrongs and they deplored the downfall of those fair hopes of a reign which had at the outset appeared to be inaugurating an era of peace and righteousness.

Besenval, himself vexedly refers to the wave of general disaffection. "Feelings of righteous resentment and justice," he observes, "were overcome by a kind of philosophical compassion. Discussions of tyranny, true justice, the liberty of the subject and the law, are heard on all sides."

Marie Antoinette came in for the greater share of the blame. "Her part in the matter," wrote the Comte de Provence later, "gave her the reputation of being bad-tempered and revengeful." And Mercy bewailed the selfishness of false friends, who, "Whilst exciting in her heart feelings of hatred, sacrificed without scruple to their own personal ends the glory and usefulness of the Queen." Even the most kindly-disposed deplored the fact that her first essay in the field of politics, her first clutch at power, should have been made in the cause of revenge. She lost prestige. The graceful young Queen, the sweet Princess of the fairy tales, who worked wonders as she passed, leaving blessings behind her, disappeared once and for all. That charming vision vanished to be gradually replaced by another and a sadly different one.

The hope of the Queen's well-wishers were now concentrated on the Coronation, which great event took place

LOUIS XVI

(Victoria and Albert Museum)

[*face p. 72*

before the echoes of the political ſtorm had had time to die away. At firſt all went well, and Mary Antoinette appeared to be regaining all her former popularity. She had only a ſpectator's part to play at Rheims, for since the days of Louis XIII, it had been the cuſtom for the Monarch, alone to receive the holy oil. Marie Antoinette entered whole-heartedly into the proceedings. Her husband travelled in great ſtate with a numerous suite, but she reached Rheims quite quietly at nightfall, accompanied by her brothers-in-law. However, all along the quiet country roads, under the silvery moon, great crowds had assembled and long and loud acclamations greeted her on her way. Next morning, very early, she went to watch the King's ſtate entry and she ſtood in the ſtreet like an ordinary person to the delight of all who recognised her.

In the afternoon the provincial nobility and gentry attended a reception which was held in the Archbishop's palace. The Queen had a charming smile and word for each and all and won universal praise. Her behaviour, moreover, was absolutely perfect on the great day of the Coronation itself, which took place on Sunday the 11th June. She sat in a tribune, surrounded by the Princesses and her ladies, and her gravity and her evident emotion touched all present. Her tears fell faſt, when at the moment of the enthronement the vaſt assembly burſt into enthusiaſtic shouts, which awoke the echoes of the ancient Cathedral. "I was quite surprised to find myself in tears," reports the Duc de Croy "and to see all around me in like case; the Queen was so overcome, that her eyes were ſtreaming and she was obliged to wipe her tears away with her handkerchief, which increased the general emotion. The King was evidently deeply affected."

In the evening, when the State ceremonies were

over, the King, quite plainly dressed, his wife leaning on his arm, walked with her for more than an hour in the crowded streets. They had no guard, no police protection of any kind. There were no barriers between the Sovereigns and their people. All and sundry down to the very poorest, approached and kissed the Queen's robe and she spoke kindly to all, saying to any who tried to protect her from the throng: "Gently, gentlemen, let them come close, they will do no harm." At one point, she saw two workmen who, afraid to press too near, were shouting "Long live the good King!" She went up to them, took their hands and drawing them towards Louis, said: "Behold him, your good King!" These and other such happy little incidents caused unparalleled enthusiasm and according to an eye-witness the people were "quite mad with joy."

Marie Antoinette's impressions of all that had occurred are charmingly expressed in a note to her Mother: "The Coronation was perfect in every way. Everyone was delighted with the King and he certainly ought to be delighted with his subjects. I was quite overcome. I wept in spite of myself and no one blamed me. It is very evident that when the poor people are so good to us we should do what is possible for their happiness. The King is full of this feeling, as for myself, I shall never forget the Coronation Day."

So thinks and speaks the real Marie Antoinette when she is her own natural self, tender-hearted, impressionable, full of generous instincts. Alas, however, nothing can be relied on to make a real and lasting impression on her variable, emotional nature. Her tears were hardly dried, the Court had not left Rheims, before she was once more drawn by her advisers into a vexatious intrigue against the known political views and wishes of the King. The Baron

de Besenval was once more the ringleader in the affair. He thought it the propitious moment to expedite the recall of Choiseul, who was at Rheims, having assisted by the King's permission at the Coronation. D'Aiguillon was, as we have seen, exiled from the Court, Maurepas had remained in Paris, Louis himself, softened by all the touching ceremonies, would probably be easily persuaded by his wife to forget his ancient grudges against the former Minister of Louis XV and to restore him once more to grace and favour. Other friends of the political party promised to second Besenval, the Comte d'Artois entered into the plot and Marie Antoinette was implored to strike a decisive blow in the important affair. At first all went well and according to plan. The Queen, by way of opening the proceedings was to accord Choiseul a personal interview, during which he proposed to explain all his plans and ideas. In the sort of gossiping ant-heap which was what the city of Rheims most resembled at the moment, such a striking mark of favour would inevitably publicly indicate the Queen's protective attitude and cause her to employ every effort to overcome the King's dislike, to force his hand as it were, and oblige him to restore the Duke to power. But the grand difficulty lay in the obtaining of the King's permission for the interview to take place at all, so the Queen undertook to employ all her very considerable womanly tact in the delicate affair. On Monday, the twelfth of June, seizing a moment when the King was alone, she approached him gracefully, congratulated him on his special success of the preceding day, then, seeing that he was amicably disposed, she, in the most natural way in the world and in the most innocent of voices, said she would much like to chat for a little with her old friend Choiseul, but that it was difficult to find a suitable time, every hour at Rheims being so fully occupied. Louis fell into the trap at once and

himself suggested to his wife the morning of the next day as a convenient opportunity.

The audience accordingly took place at the time appointed by the King; it lasted nearly an hour and excited intense curiosity and all manner of conjecture, indeed it was a subject of discussion in all European political circles. Choiseul played his part carefully and well. He avoided asking any personal favours but confined himself to uttering expressions of devotion to the Queen, proffering advice which he, from his own experience, judged would be useful to her in her dealings with the King, who, Choiseul declared, might be managed in two different ways, "by gentleness" or "by fear." The childish, impulsive Queen was duly impressed, and took the crafty advice only too seriously to heart.

For the moment the plot ended at this stage, for the gossip, the indiscreetly displayed satisfaction of Choiseul's friends, together with Marie Antoinette's important airs, awoke the King's suspicions and he became aware of the trick, which had been played upon him. He was extremely angry as Choiseul discovered to his cost. During the Queen's reception at which the King was present, the Duke was announced, whereupon His Majesty at once rose and "decamped" in the most obvious manner. Worse was to follow next day on the eve of the departure from Rheims. When Choiseul, among the other guests came to kiss the royal hand, the King hastily withdrew it and turned his head away, making, according to an eye witness, "a horrible grimace." It was enough, Choiseul saw that the game was up and retired to his country seat, leaving his partisans to face the storm.

Amid the general discomfiture Marie Antoinette alone took up a calm indifferent attitude. She was delighted at the public affront to d'Aiguillon and diverted by the clever trick she had succeeded in play-

ing on her husband; her little personal success more than made up for the collapse of her political ambitions. Her almost infantile outlook is apparent in the little note which she wrote to her confidant the Comte de Rosenberg, as follows: "Perhaps you may have heard of the audience I accorded to the Duc de Choiseul at Rheims. It made such a talk that I almost think old Maurepas must have been afraid to retire to rest in his own house! Of course you will guess that I did not see him (Choiseul) without first speaking to the King, but you will never guess how cleverly I managed. I pretended that I wanted to see M. de Choiseul and that it was difficult to find a convenient hour. I did it so well that the poor dear man himself arranged a suitable time, I think I have displayed womanly tact in this instance!"

By some means or another this imprudent letter became public property at the Viennese Court. Copies of it were circulated and the scandal was great. The Empress was aghast. "What style, what a way of expressing herself! She is rushing on her ruin!" Joseph II was even more disgusted, he surpassed himself in brotherly frankness in the following letter, the rough draft of which still exists. "What are you thinking about in thus displacing ministers and exiling them to the country and discussing them in a manner highly unsuited to your position? What can possibly make you imagine that your opinion is of any value whatsoever, you, who never open a book, never listen to sensible talk for the space of a quarter of an hour in a month, never reflect, never meditate, etc., etc."

This may seem to us to-day to be rather severe castigation for a foolish prank, but one must remember what in those days, in the vast solemn silence of Versailles, was the result of the extraordinarily far-reaching echo of any syllable that fell from the Olympian heights of the Throne. The echo did not immediately pene-

trate to the ear of the mob, but an opinion was formed among the upper classes, thence it filtered down to the populace to be disastrously twisted and exaggerated. Marie Antoinette's fault and misfortune lay in the fact that she, out of pure frivolity and carelessness, shocked, wounded and gained the dislike of many of those individuals who are the mainstay of a reigning monarchy; of those, whose enmity, a princess—more especially a stranger princess—could not incur without peril. From the exalted regions of the Court descended the storm, which so soon overwhelmed her transient popularity. The Comte de Provence, in his interesting memoirs, indicates the progress of the gradual disaffection, as follows. "The enthusiasm felt for the Queen on her arrival in France lasted in full force until 1775. Then it began to diminish, and soon it was non-existent. Libels and songs began to be circulated about her and they even dared to compare her with Messalina."

This unjust change of opinion, which had the most fatal consequences is hardly perceptible at this stage of our story, but it will all too soon become terribly apparent; why and wherefore it must be our business to make clear. Hitherto mistakes and want of tact merely, have been indicated, now, however, more serious errors, must of necessity, be dwelt upon.

CHAPTER IV

THE ERA OF FOLLY

In the life of Marie Antoinette a comparatively limited period, a period of about three years' duration, decided once and for all her ultimate destiny. It is the period which we are now about to consider and which dates from the year 1775 to the close of 1778; or from immediately after the accession to the date of the birth of her first child. It is the period of dissipation, of careless pleasure and of reckless expenditure; in short, it is the era of folly and its consequences were disastrous.

Before attempting to describe the Queen at this unhappy stage of her career, I should wish to make some excuses for her. What has her life been hitherto? A rather isolated childhood passed in a gloomy, stiff Court is suddenly exchanged for an existence in a strange land, at the side of a fifteen-year old husband, a clumsy, boorish lad. An old, dissipated, morose grandfather too, has to be reckoned with and there are dark intrigues and snares of all descriptions, awaiting her at every turn; then, suddenly, at nineteen years of age, the Crown, supreme power, adulation, excessive luxury, the threefold gift of a diadem, of youth and of beauty. There is no one to act with legitimate authority, to guide her aright. Her husband is a mere nonentity, her mother is far away and moreover unlovable. She is surrounded by evil counsellors, detestable examples are constantly before her eyes. A saint would hardly have escaped altogether unscathed from such surroundings, and

poor Marie Antoinette is but a woman, nay, she is a mere girl, a girl playing with a crown.

I shall not deny that she allowed herself to be drawn into committing grave faults and errors, there is unfortunately no doubt but that this was the case. But it is on the whole surprising that her faults and follies were not even more grave than they were. It is extremely risky to be forever frisking on the edge of a precipice. Marie Antoinette's natural purity, however, preserved her from actually plunging into the abyss. She was frequently indiscreet and alas! her reputation has consequently suffered, but she never actually compromised her virtue. This fact has been proved over and over again, and by the most severe and bitter of her many critics. She sinned more from want of thought than from any actual evil intention and her mistakes are usually only grave, by reason of her queenly state, they would have been the merest peccadilloes in an ordinary mortal. "She has faults like others," says a contemporary writer, "but they are amiable faults, like herself. She came to France in extreme youth and she has in all probability contracted the greater part of them here. She is devoted to dress, to frivolity, to entertainments, to parade of any and every kind. She often showers gifts on unworthy recipients. She is changeable and she makes fun of any awkward, ill-dressed women who are presented to her. But her heart is good, as all who have the honour to be near Her Majesty well know."

Warm-hearted, feather-brained, such in brief, is the character of Marie Antoinette. The chief cause of her many mistakes was her perpetual state of boredom and her dislike of the cold and stately monotony of the official receptions at the Court of Versailles which froze her petulant, exuberant youthful spirits. She therefore started the fashion of holding small,

informal gatherings, at which there was a total absence of etiquette, the guests merely chatting and mutually entertaining each other. She gave impromptu balls, which usually were held, not in the gorgeous halls of the Palace, but in temporary wooden structures which were erected along the terraces of Versailles and charmingly decorated.

Anyone who had been presented was at liberty to attend these elegant functions. But it was common knowledge that the Queen's preference lay with those who amused her, who were gay and youthful. The stalwart pillars of the Court, the older ladies, the magnificent gentlemen of a certain age, felt that they were not wanted, that they were out of place; the Queen was moreover, credited with the observation that she could not understand how anyone over thirty years of age dared to appear at Court and so it all went gaily on. Louis XVI, on one occasion, asked his wife to invite a certain personage who he himself particularly affected. "He dances too badly," replied the Queen. "As to that," was the King's reply, "no one dances worse than I do—must I also stay away?"

These celebrated parties which at first are quite small and early affairs, soon begin to last into the small hours of the morning. Accordingly, the King, who dislikes late functions, takes to retiring long before the close of the entertainment, which is gaily prolonged in his absence until dawn. No one misses him, for he is not ornamental, with his heavy shoulders, his stumbling gait, his short sight which prevents his recognising people when they are within a couple of yards of him. His loud laugh, his heavy jokes and his awkward way of dropping his hat or entangling himself in his sword, make him ridiculous and in spite of his gorgeous dress he looks, as a courtier remarks "like a peasant who has just left his cart." The

Queen is ashamed of his manners, the guests are annoyed, and so, in spite of his real kindliness, there is a general feeling of relief when he retires; sometimes indeed, the clock is surreptitiously advanced, to hasten the happy moment. In his absence all goes more rapidly, conversation turns on the fashionable topics of the day, on literature, on the theatre, on general gossip. Certain high Court functionaries, even, come in for their share of quizzing, for the Queen enjoys a joke and can be very merry at her nieghbour's expense, sometimes even at the expense of the King himself.

Marie Antoinette is happy and at her ease, she takes an active part in the talk, she tries to please and she succeeds in so doing. According to Besenval, "Always more the woman than the Queen, she forgot that her fate was to live and die upon a throne, she desired to wield the sceptre which the gift of beauty accords to any lovely woman." The witty Comtesse de Boigne makes a similar observation in somewhat different terms. "The Queen adorned herself to be in the fashion, she incurred debts to be in the fashion, she played high to be in the fashion, she pretended to be strong-minded to be in the fashion. She aimed at being the prettiest and the smartest woman of her time, and this most unsuitable ambition on the part of a great Queen, was the sole cause of her mistakes, which have been so cruelly exaggerated."

Marie Antoinette herself, in a lively little note scribbled to her friend Rosenberg, depicts her sensations after the diversions of the Carnival and the Lenten austerities. "Admire my misfortune! The devotions of Holy Week gave me a much worse cold than any of my balls! I daresay you will say that is highly probable—I have a concert every Monday which is charming. There is no formal etiquette,

I sing myself, with some specially selected ladies, there are also some pleasant men, who are not very young."

These same men are really habitués of the Court. They play, they dance, they sup in the Queen's apartments, and this is a very decided innovation, for until now, no man outside the immediate Royal Family, had ever thought of sitting at table with the Queen of France. This dangerous familiarity soon fosters a sort of gallantry, feminine rivalries and coquettish tricks are indulged in and tittle-tattle goes on behind the ladies' fans. When the exquisite, seventeen year old Madame de la Tour du Pin is presented to Marie Antoinette, the latter remarks discontentedly the girl's wonderful complexion, which is even more beautiful than her own, of which she is justly proud. The Duchesse de Duras accordingly whispers to the newcomer. "Don't stand opposite the windows." But Marie Antoinette is determined to be critical and laughs at Madame de la Tour du Pin's fondness for bright colours and at the poppies which she wears twisted in her chestnut locks.

There was an absence of etiquette and complete freedom of action in all the daily proceedings. The Queen would go out, walk, call on her friends, accompanied merely by one or two ladies, dispensing altogether with her body-guard. She would drive in a cabriolet, often with the Comte d'Artois, and there were frequent sleighing parties on the canals in the park, gallops on horseback in the woods, donkey-rides, all sorts of harmless fun. An innocent existence, certainly, but a futile, giddy, inconsequent one, which would have been pardonable if a pretty woman of the middle classes had been in question, but which was foolish and reprehensible when led by the daughter of the Imperial House of Austria, the Consort of the King of France, whose predecessors on the Throne

had ever lived retired and dignified in their ſtately seclusion, in their solemn oratories.

The firſt result of the new régime is the gradual disappearance of all the old habitués of the Court, of the great lords and the ſtately dowagers, of the "centenarians" as the Queen calls them. They are naturally offended at being treated as outsiders, almoſt as intruders, all consideration being beſtowed upon a ſtrictly limited circle of intimates, and they and their numerous followers tend less and less to frequent the Court, indeed, in the course of a very few years, those vaſt and gorgeous halls, formerly filled with a brilliant throng, are almoſt completely desolate and forsaken. Sometimes, at the Queen's ball, only about a dozen women and as many cavaliers are to be seen. The reſt are sulking and so they ſtay away and inveigh more or less loudly againſt the powers that be and againſt the youthful Court. According to Besenval no one was satisfied and often spiteful remarks about the Queen were permitted, nay even encouraged.

It is necessary to mention the balls at the Opera which Marie Antoinette at firſt frequented in company with the King. Soon, however, she began to attend them on her own account together with her various intimate friends. All this was allowable up to a certain point, but it was ſtrictly laid down that the sovereign was always to be recognised and never to be approached as one of the ordinary public. This salutary ordinance was all too soon set aside and forgotten and the Queen of France was so ſtrictly incognita, that she was joſtled about by the frequenters of the place and hardly protected by her cavaliers from disagreeable familiarities and liberties. Indeed, one night, a bold mask approaching the box where she was sitting, addressed her as "Antoinette," and said that at such an hour she should be at home "with her good man, who is snoring all alone." The Queen merely laughed,

replied gaily, and leaned down so far over the front of the box towards the aggressor, that she almost touched him with her bare shoulder. Naturally all the by-standers were shocked and scandalized at the little scene. In February 1777 she went six times running to these masked balls. "She talks to all and sundry," lamented Mercy Argenteau; "Walks about followed by young men—the Public will never get accustomed to this loss of dignity."

It is a perfect whirl of dissipation and feelings of fatigue seem to be non-existent. One night, at the Carnival, relates the Duc de Croy, the Queen returns to Versailles from the ball at the Opera at seven in the morning, she runs to the King's apartment for a few minutes and then immediately sets off to Sablons to attend a race.

On another occasion, after a similar prank, it happens to be Sunday morning, and the officer of her body-guard asks at what hour she will hear Mass. "I have already heard it in Paris," she answers laughingly, and the remark, to say the least, is in singularly bad taste, and makes a very bad impression. "In short," the excellent Duke goes on to say, "the Queen is entirely given up to pleasure, she is constantly at the theatre or at the balls at the Opera, never still for a moment and always surrounded by the most brilliant, the most audacious set of young people." The King's line of conduct is favourably contrasted with that of his Consort. "He goes to bed early and gets up at dawn and writes for two good hours every morning, without a fire, to the great edification of his body-guard."

In vain Mercy scolds and exhorts, the Queen evades his reproaches. She knows he is right she says, but after all, one is only young once, the serious hours will come fast enough, and all frivolity will vanish away. Besides, she declares, the King does not mind,

he even encourages her in her gaiety. And there is some truth in her declaration. The whole Court is amazed at Louis's forbearance. Sometimes, very occasionally, when he is very much put out, he ventures on a reproof which is not always very suitable or in delicate taste. For example, one night Marie Antoinette, returning with the Comte d'Artois, from some outing or other, about two in the morning, finds to her surprise, that the great gates of the Palace are closed, and that the sentinel refuses to open them. It is by the express orders of the King he declares. The Queen has to enter by a side door, and Louis and his Consort have next morning a sufficiently sharp discussion. "I retire at eleven o'clock," he says; "I do not wish to be roused out of my first sleep—surely my rest at least may be respected!" There is a regular domestic scene and squabble, finally the King gives in, countermands his orders and all goes on as before.

Another complaint laid to Marie Antoinette's account was concerned with her extravagance, the extraordinary luxury of her dress and personal appointments. As Dauphine she had been admired for her moderation in all details of her toilet, but all was changed once she became Queen. Far from frowning on any eccentricities in costume or headdress, on enormous crinolines or panniers, she accentuated these fashionable absurdities, endeavouring, as usual, to eclipse all around her. No other lady displayed such high feathers, such extraordinary headgear, such ample skirts. She sent her portrait, taken about this time, to the Empress, who immediately returned it, with the remark that the messenger must have made a mistake and changed the Queen's likeness for that of an "actress." Louis himself protested feebly at times, on other occasions, he descended to rather feeble jokes by way of remonstrance. For example, when the

Queen took it into her head to set the fashion of clubbed hair or catogans for women, hitherto only worn by men, he appeared one day in her apartments with a high powdered wig. "I am thinking of introducing this style of headdress for men," he said; "It is my first attempt in this line." "Ah, Sire! never! It is frightful!" "But, Madame, men must have something with which to adorn their heads, you have appropriated the plume, the curled locks, the queue; we still had our catogan, which is, moreover I think, hideous when worn by a woman, and now you propose to take that as well." The Queen was much amused and renounced the idea of the catogan.

Much more serious than these rather childish caprices was her craving for jewels and all kinds of precious stones. The ancient glories of the regalia of France did not suffice and she was perpetually launching out into reckless expense. In January 1776 she spent 600,000 francs on diamond earrings, and six months afterwards another 250,000 francs on a couple of bracelets. At a fancy ball, at which she appeared as Gabrielle d'Estrées, her costume was truly resplendent. A black hat, trimmed with white plumes held in place by four large diamonds and a loop of precious stones valued at 2000 pounds. Her stomacher and her girdle were of diamonds, her dress was white gauze studded with silver stars, trimmed with golden fringe, which was attached to the skirt by more diamonds. A fairylike vision, indeed, but a ruinous one, from the point of view of the Treasury.

These extravagant fashions set by the highest in the land were eagerly followed by young women at Court and in general society. Luxury and eccentricity prevailed, at first only amongst the higher classes but very soon the lower grades of society were affected as well and the public, not unreasonably, blamed the Consort of the King of France for the unhappy state of affairs.

By the close of the year 1776, the newspapers were publishing severe and well-deserved criticisms. One such, declared "That the Queen all unwittingly, it is true, has done irreparable injury to the nation. In the passionate desire to copy her example, women's dress has become so enormously expensive, that husbands, generally, are unable to pay for what is required, so lovers have become the fashion. Despite Her Majesty's edifying example of wifely fidelity, she has been as much of a danger to the morals of the people as was Marie de Medicis."

We must now touch on Marie Antoinette's chief and most deadly failing, that fatal weakness which did her more harm than all her other mistakes and frivolities together, namely the passion for high play which possessed her for so long, which indeed she never, almost to the very last, altogether abandoned. Play, high play, even, was of course no novelty at the Court of Versailles. Louis XIV and Louis XV had both encouraged it and the *jeu du Roi*, as it was called, had been a recognised institution at Court for a hundred years or more. The abuses of the system and the enormous sums which had been squandered by Madame de Montespan and Madame de Pompadour (the two most famous gamblers among many) in the actual presence of the too indulgent King and protector were but too well remembered. Still, hitherto Kings' *mistresses* only had been involved, the behaviour of the *Queens* of France had always been beyond reproach, and Marie Leczinska's quiet parties of whist which might have taken place in the house of any decent citizen, were regretfully remembered.

The Queen, had she but been left to herself, might have followed the good example of her predecessors, indeed, during the first years of her married life, it seemed more than probable that she would do so, but, after the accession, the fatal influence of those

around her prevailed. The Duc de Chartres and the Comte d'Artois were both born gamblers and they never rested until the Court had become a regular hotbed for their favourite vice. It was not easy at first, for the King was against the practice. He was naturally of a saving disposition and on principle strictly economical. He cared for no higher stakes at play than those afforded by the game of tric-trac, by which he never lost more than a few pounds. "I understand your playing high if it amuses you," he would say to those around; "you are risking your own money, but I should be risking other people's." One day the Comte d'Artois was bewailing the loss of a very considerable sum. "Ah," rejoined the King laughingly, "Our family is truly in a bad way; I, too, have actually lost six pounds!" Once, and once only, did Louis yield to temptation, to the dismay of the faithful Maurepas, who said to a friend that he might as well pack up and go if the King were seriously to take to gambling. Fortunately, the young Sovereign had no luck, and in the course of a few nights' play he lost more than eighteen hundred louis. He was disheartened by his non-success, and swore to renounce cards for ever, and he scrupulously kept his word. The Queen, equally unlucky, was alas! less scrupulous and only too ready to listen to the evil counsellors around her. Very soon what had been at first merely a pastime became an actual necessity of her being, a sort of passion. In two years' time she had absolutely no control over herself. At her faro table she would sit in a sort of dream, with piles of gold melting away in front of her, the Comte d'Artois encouraging, exciting, urging her on the while. In one evening at Marly she lost 500 louis, and her brother-in-law 17,000. The senseless folly was repeated almost every night. Marie Antoinette played not only at home but also in the drawing-rooms

of all her friends. As soon as she arrived at Madame de Lamballe's apartments or at Madame de Guéméné's, the card-table was set out and the Queen took her seat. Her two favourite games were the old-fashioned *lansquenet* and the newer and more risky faro. One evening, whilst playing faro, the young Count of Castellane lost 100,000 louis at the Queen's table. The King, as a rule, heard little or nothing of all that was going on, his disapproval was well known. Indeed, he endeavoured to prohibit altogether certain games of chance, but he dared not keep to his good resolution; he gave in weakly, and even smiled at open disobedience.

Once at Fontainebleau he had allowed "one single game of faro." The game went on, almost without pause for thirty-six hours, and Louis, at last, remonstrated. Marie Antoinette replied that, though he had said only "one single game," he had not fixed any definite time as to its length. The King merely laughed in reply and told her that she was "a good for nothing."

Sometimes, by way of appeasing her husband, perhaps also to silence her own conscience, Marie Antoinette would levy a tax on play: and this tax went to the poor. One of the two curés of Versailles would stand at the entrance of the card-room every night and hand her a purse. She would then make a collection among the players saying to each one: "*Pour les pauvres s'il vous plait.*" It was usual for the women each to contribute six crowns, the men a louis; and sometimes a hundred louis was collected, never less than fifty. This pious duty accomplished, the mad business of the evening would be entered on *con amore*. An unhappy result of the deplorable folly lay in the fact that it was the means of bringing most unsuitable people to Court. True it is, that at first great nobles, such as the Duc de Fronsac, had been willing, by way

of pleasing the Queen, to hold the bank at her particular table; soon, however, faced as they were with ruin, they renounced play altogether, and consequently recourse was had to professional gamesters. For long the Bank was held by a certain Sieur Poinçot, soldier of fortune, frequenter of public gaming-houses, vulgar in appearance, and of doubtful moral character. The scandalized spectators beheld this individual seated near the Queen and received with gracious civility. He brought other adventurers, other professionals of the gaming-table in his train. Amongst these were the so-called Marquesses of Dreneux, of de Travanet, and de la Vaupalière, whose titles were, to say the least, as doubtful as their honesty. This mixed assembly was the scene of frequent squabbles, of noisy, vulgar disputes, very damaging to the dignity of the Crown. Even more damaging was the report that certain personages of both sexes of very high rank were not always above suspicion in their play. Joseph II bitterly declared one day that the Court of France had degenerated into a gambling-hell.

The Emperor accordingly wrote to his sister and took her severely to task for the cheating, the trickery, which were going on about her. The Queen replied that she had neither seen nor heard of any cheating amongst women, but that there had always been doubtful company at Court when round games were in question, as it was customary to permit all and sundry to play. Brotherly remonstrances were of no avail, and no attention was paid to the Abbé de Vermond when he courageously declared that "infinite harm is done by the admission of persons of tarnished reputation, of doubtful antecedents into the Presence." Many of the slanders against Marie Antoinette from which she suffered long before the actual catastrophe originated at her gambling-table, at which she spent so many feverish nights. "Who would have dared,"

exclaimed a contemporary writer, "to accuse the Queen of France of selling herself for a diamond necklace, had she not been frequently seen seated at a table laden with gold pieces, which she was hoping to win from her subjects?"

The immediate result of these follies can be easily guessed; the Queen was heavily in debt. Although, since the accession, her original fortune had been more than doubled, and although, urged on by dire necessity, she had neglected her chief duty and had silenced her charitable instincts by drawing on the funds set aside for her private charities, the debt accumulated, and she became more and more heavily involved. At the close of the year 1776 Mercy, who by her request, had examined her business affairs, announced that her liabilities amounted to 487,000 livres. Marie Antoinette was thunderstruck, and it was generally reported that she had gone to Necker and that he had agreed to advance her the sum from the Privy Purse. This, however, was not the case as is now well known. The Queen appealed to Louis XVI, who fully justified this token of her trust in him. "At her very first word," writes Mercy, "the King unhesitatingly and in the very kindest manner agreed to pay the whole sum. He kept his word, and it was not the only occasion on which he was to prove his generosity."

These much-discussed events were, as may be supposed, not conducive to popularity. It was, moreover, common knowledge that the funds affected by the Queen's household were periodically inflated, that she had 300 horses in her stables, whereas the late Queen had never had more than 150, with the result of a 200,000 francs increase of yearly expenditure; that the upkeep and beautifying of the Trianon were a constant source of expense; that there, as well as at Versailles, beautiful and costly functions were of

frequent occurrence; that yearly pensions and gifts to countless families and hangers-on amounted to about 240,000 livres a year, besides gifts of land and silver. These facts were not *known* merely, but grossly exaggerated as well. To the general public, foolish extravagance seemed to be pure robbery; the ruin of the State was openly discussed and as the Comte de Provence declares: "The Queen was held in much the same estimation as were formerly the mistresses of Louis XV." Her coach, when passing, was received with dead silence or with sulky murmurs, instead of with the joyful shouts of former days. People even hated the sight of the great greyhounds which ran in front of her horses. Tongues wagged freely over all her acts and doings; her most innocent vagaries were called in question. She was said to be unscrupulous, insatiable: soon the horrid title of "Madame Deficit" will be hers.

It is the hour in which the Abbé de Vermond and Mercy Argenteau, overpowered and discouraged, cease to cry in the wilderness. The Abbé in his distress seriously thinks of retiring altogether from the field, and is prevented from doing so only by the entreaties of the Empress. "My daughter is rushing on destruction; she needs your help. Mercy and I trust that you will defer your departure until winter; should circumstances then be unchanged, I will not ask you to sacrifice yourself any longer." It is the hour in which Madame de la Marck, in writing to Gustavus III, observes: "The Queen is constantly in Paris, at the Opera, at the Play; she runs into debt; she is adorned with plumes and furbelows, and makes fun of all serious things." It is the hour in which Maria Theresa, worn out with her fruitless preaching and moralising, resolves to throw up the sponge altogether and never again to write on any subject save "*De la pluie et du beau temps.*" One ray of

hope remains. The Empress's eldest son, Joseph II, Emperor of Germany, is about to visit Paris, ostensibly with a view of seeing the French capital and greeting his sister, but in reality to lecture the Queen and to try and induce her to amend her ways. Perhaps the spoken word will have more effect than lengthy sermons sent by post. Hence the famous journey, the mere announcement of which greatly excites the people of Paris and the whole Court of Versailles.

The Imperial visit, which had been discussed, planned, and deferred on several occasions since Marie Antoiette's departure from Vienna, was finally fixed upon in the beginning of the winter of 1777. Brotherly affection and the wish to make personal acquaintance with the capital and provinces of Austria's ally were, as has been already stated, the ostensible motives of the visit, but in private letters to Mercy Joseph made no attempt to hide his intention to lecture his sister and put her on the right road, for he observed, he considered her to be "in a bad way." Apparently he was rather enjoying the prospect. By right of seniority and also by disposition, he had always taken upon himself to advise and reprimand his brothers and sisters; he was as a matter of fact a severe and rather brutal critic. Such was Marie Antoinette's opinion, and she had on several occasions rebelled against her brother's authority. She endured with resigned indifference the Empress's objurgations: "She is too severe, but she is my mother and she loves me; when she speaks I must listen in silence," she declared; but her brother's reproofs annoyed her. On one occasion, indeed, when he had been more than usually outspoken, she almost completely lost control of her temper; however, on reflection she calmed down, remarking to Mercy Argenteau: "I will never really quarrel with my brother. My reply shall be in a jesting style."

The immediate prospect of a critical examination and personal inspection of her mode of life was not, as may be imagined, altogether pleasing to Marie Antoinette. "The Queen," according to Mercy, "is torn between the longing to behold her august brother whom she tenderly loves and the dread of his seeing when near at hand, much to disapprove of in her conduct." To which Kaunitz replied curtly: "The Queen is afraid of being scolded." The Empress, for her part, though she was pressing the Emperor to undertake the expedition, was by no means persuaded that it would be successful. She was acquainted with her son's rather savage nature and of his incapacity for any delicate negotiations. She was accordingly nervous as to the result of his tactics where a sensitive, highly-strung woman was concerned. "One of two things will occur," she confided to Mercy; "Either my daughter will win over the Emperor or he will make her impatient by wishing to lecture her too much." And she seems to think the first the more likely probability, for she continues: "I think that pretty and *enticing* as my daughter is, that she will gain his approval and that he will be flattered by her." In which case the visit would be of no avail.

Months passed before all the negotiations were concluded. It was at last arranged that the Emperor should travel strictly incognito; that he should not stay at Court; that during his visit he should not, unless the Queen took the initiative, speak to her on any political or private matter whatsoever, but that he should confine himself to silently observing and listening to what was going on, and at the moment of departure only, make known to his sister the result of his observations. All being arranged, Joseph set out on his journey. He entered Paris on Friday, 18th April, attired in grey and wearing no orders, without an escort and seated in an open carriage with his

aide-de-camp; he was unluckily soaked through and through, for it was pouring with rain. Next morning early he posted to Versailles and found the Queen in her bed-chamber. The brother and sister were at first somewhat shy, but the kindly, simple King soon arrived upon the scene and the ice was so far broken. They dined in private, waited on by the Queen's women; all three perched upon folding stools to obviate questions of etiquette. Dinner was soon over. Joseph and Marie Antoinette said very little and seemed ill at ease; Louis, surprisingly, did all the talking.

The Emperor soon came back to Versailles. He sometimes stayed the night there, in the little Hôtel de Justice, sleeping on a straw mattress and covered with a wolfskin. Thus, in silence and by the force of mere example, he hoped to give his sister lessons in the simple life and of philosophical detachment.

During the first few days Joseph kept almost entirely to the premeditated plan of silent observation. One day at the Trianon, when alone with Marie Antoinette he did, indeed, let fall a few casual remarks on the rocks ahead of her, on the dangers of dissipation and the unsuitability of high play; but his tone was kindly and far from dictatorial and she did not take alarm. On the contrary, she thanked him and assured him that "the time was approaching in which she would follow his good advice." This peaceful interlude was, however, of short duration. A few days later, there was another conversation and, according to Mercy, a decidedly stormy one, and from now on Joseph forgot his good intentions and resumed his accustomed rough, cutting, dictatorial tone. The Queen served as a target for his darts of coarse irony, his rude remarks. He inveighed against her chosen company, her assortment of knaves. He found fault with her manners, her conversation, her toilet.

One evening, when going to the theatre, she was

putting on her rouge before him and one of her ladies. "A little more!" he exclaimed: "Beneath the eyes, nose, more rouge, like a fury, like Madame, here! . . ." Another day his sister asked his opinion as to her plumed headdress. "I think it too light to bear the burden of a crown," was the reply.

At first the Queen behaved with exemplary patience. But at length the repeated attacks wore her out and she declared, not unreasonably, that her brother pushed frankness to the verge of rudeness. She complained to Mercy: "I shall know what to say to him." she observed, adding, however, at once "that she means to mend her ways," but that she will not begin to do so until after Joseph's departure, just to show him that she will not be "managed" after this arbitrary fashion. Meanwhile she kicked more than ever against his constant interference. Quarrels and sulking-fits ensued, and finally the Queen roundly declared to the unskilful pedant that if he stayed much longer "there will certainly be grave disputes."

In one matter only and, moreover, a highly important matter, did Joseph succeed in making any good impression at Versailles. The domestic existence of the King and Queen was in a precarious state, for, in spite of Louis's indulgence towards his wife, the coldness between the pair had increased rather than diminished. The dissimilarity in their tastes and habits resulted in their leading almost separate lives. The King was becoming more and more of a hermit. Any time that he could spare from his duties as sovereign was spent in hunting or in his little workshop with the locksmith Gamin, where, all unkempt, his hands black and covered with perspiration, he hammered and filed like any workman, an object of disgust and contempt to Marie Antoinette. There was a kind of dull resentment between husband and wife: he was hurt, without however, daring to say so;

she too openly showed her disdain. "The Queen," writes Mercy, "has too poor an opinion of the mind and moral capacity of her Consort . . . she thinks that because she is able to govern him by fear, kind and considerate conduct is unnecessary." The Queen herself says much the same, as is seen in the following note to Rosenberg: "My tastes are quite different from those of the King; he only cares for hunting or manual labour. As you are aware, I should be quite out of place near a forge. I could not be Vulcan, and the rôle of Venus would probably displease him much more than my usual occupations, which he does not really object to."

The explication of the mutual misunderstanding and the strange situation of the youthful Royal pair lies in the extraordinary reserve which Louis persists in maintaining towards his wife, and Marie Antoinette's increasing chagrin is very perceptible in her private letters to her Mother. "I do assure you that the fault is not on my side," she writes. "My dear Mama must perceive that I am in a highly embarrassing situation." When a son is born to the Comtesse d'Artois, she bursts into bitter complaints. "I cannot tell my dear Mama what I have suffered in seeing an heir to the throne who is not my son, but I was careful to show all due concern for mother and child."

With his sister first, then with his brother-in-law, Joseph ventured to approach the delicate subject. The Queen was quite open with him, told him of all her fears, her daily renewed disappointments. Louis, for his part, with his usual rather coarse good humour, was exceedingly communicative—so much so, indeed, as almost to embarrass the Emperor, who however persevered in his excellent advice; he moreover had a private interview with the doctor Lassone, which had highly important results. He endeavoured to create a greater intimacy between husband and wife to get

them mutually interested in each other's occupations, and he really seemed to have achieved his object, for, when he finally departed Louis observed genially to Marie Antoinette: "We have been together more often and for longer periods of time during the Emperor's visit and I am greatly indebted to him."

On the eve of the departure fixed for May 31st Joseph left with his sister a long homily in writing which was intended to serve as a sort of moral guide to her henceforth. His hopes regarding this effusion were high indeed. "It will give me great pleasure," we find him writing shortly afterwards to Mercy, "if you are able to assure me that my lectures have had some effect on the life and habits of the Queen." It must, however, be said that Marie Antoinette would have required really angelic patience to be deeply and lastingly affected by this long drawn-out sentimental screed, which moreover rings false. "The years are passing," are the concluding phrases; "you have no longer the excuse of being but a child. What will happen if you delay longer? You will be an unhappy woman, a still more unhappy princess. And you will break the heart of him who loves you best on earth—*my* heart, for I can never be indifferent to your misfortune. . . ."

Marie Antoinette did as a matter of fact appear at first to be somewhat affected. The affectionate words, the solemn farewells impressed themselves upon her frivolous, affectionate heart for a short—a very short—time. Mercy reports that during the first weeks after the Emperor's departure she honestly endeavours to lead a more regular, serious life. "She has spoken most creditably about her plans for altering her habits . . . it is very evident that she is seriously reflecting on being more attentive to the King, more frequently in his society." Again, two months later: "This august Princess," he writes to Joseph, "is still follow-

ing out in several directions the rules which your Majesty laid down," he goes on to say that " there is considerably less frivolous amusement."

Alas, in another two months' time all is changed. " I cannot express my astonishment," writes the Ambassador, " at the speedy effacement of the impressions made by the Emperor on the mind of the Queen. It is really unbelievable that matters here should be almost worse than they were before the Emperor's visit but such is unhappily the case. I have reason to believe that his Majesty's rule of conduct has been suppressed—nay thrown in the fire." High play was started again with redoubled energy. In 1778 the year following these events, the Abbé de Vermond was commanded by Marie Antoinette to make out the balance of the preceding twelve months' gains and losses. He showed that the Queen had lost 14,000 louis and had won 6500; the losses being thus well over 7000 louis. " She seems," observes the Abbé, " thunderstruck at the amount."

As a matter of fact, the only lasting result of the Emperor's visit was the success of his endeavours to bring the Royal pair together. Thus, towards the end of August, about three months after his departure from Versailles, we find Marie Antoinette exclaiming joyously early one morning to her reader, Madame Campan: " Now, at last I am really Queen of France ! " —and in her letters, as well as in Mercy's, there are references to the happy change in the situation. Louis himself addresses a few confidential lines to his brother-in-law as follows: " Vous me reprocherez de ne vous avoir pas mandé ce qui c'est passé entre la Reine et moi. J'attendais quelque chose de plus pour vous en faire part. Deux fois nous avons en quelques lègères espérances, mais malgré qu'elles n'aient pas réussi, je suis sûr d'avoir fait *tout ce qu'il faut*, j'espère que l'année prochaine ne se passera

pas sans vous avoir donné un neveu ou une nièce." He adds affectionately: "We owe our happiness to you, for since your visit everything has been more easy and now all is well." Soon, indeed, the longed-for signs of approaching motherhood appeared, and the Queen's heart overflowed with joy and pride. Every week, with childish delight, she would measure her waist to make sure that all was as it should be: the amusing trick she played on the King, when the doctors had assured her that all was indeed well, must be given in the original. "Sire," she said seriously one day, "I have come to complain of one of your subjects who has grossly insulted me." The King begged her to explain herself: "Oui Sire, il s'en est trouvé un assez audacieux, vous le dirai-je? pour me donner des coups de pied dans le ventre!" The delighted King shouted with laughter and clasped his wife in his arms.

Extraordinary precautions, unceasing vigilance prevail in order that no risks to the Queen's well-being may be incurred. All balls, visits to Paris, riding, driving even—all such pursuits are abandoned, without a sigh, and Louis exerts himself to the utmost to invent amusements that will not be too fatiguing for the interesting patient. One day he surprises her by arranging a masquerade at Versailles. The whole Court, even the older ladies and the most distinguished statesmen pass before her in varied and curious attire: Maurepas appears as Cupid, his venerable spouse as Venus, Sartine, Minister of Marine, has a map of the world upon his head, on his breast is displayed the map of America and on his back that of England. The old Maréchale de Mirepoix is disguised as the young Aurora; they dance a minuet as lightly and gracefully as though they were but twenty years old.

The first fortnight of December 1778 was a time of deep suspense for the whole French nation. The

Queen's accouchement was imminent and prayers that her child might be a Dauphin were offered up in all Churches, in all Protestant meeting-houses and in all synagogues. Great numbers of people had taken up their abode at Versailles, in order to obtain the very first news of the event, and prices of food and lodging had therefore risen enormously. In the afternoon of the 19th the Queen began to be ill and was very ill all night. A considerable crowd, after the barbarous fashion of her time, had gathered in her chamber. The people pressed close round the bed, so much so as to impede the work of the doctor, who was the brother of the Abbé Vermond. At length, at half-past eleven in the morning, the child was born, and at its first cry there were joyful acclamations and clapping of hands—almost at once, however, the sex of the infant was known, and a dead silence ensued. The Queen, exhausted though she was, understood, wrung her hands, exclaiming: "It is a girl!" and fell back in a dead faint. The doctors promptly bled her and she regained consciousness, but for a few minutes she was in imminent peril.

Louis behaved admirably all through the critical time; he was in despair when his wife's life was in danger and overjoyed when assured of her safety. He was devoted during her convalescence, taking up his abode in her room between her couch and the infant's cradle. He never left the palace for more than a week, he who as a rule could not exist a day without exercise in the open air.

"Our young monarch," writes Hardy, the Parisian publisher, "has shown his august spouse that he can be as tender a husband as any decent citizen in our capital."

By degrees Louis resumes his usual habits, but his whole attitude has changed, as all around clearly perceive. Courtiers observe that he is more cheerful,

more at his ease, more decided in manner. "It is natural," as someone remarked, "that husbands who do not play their allotted part should be shamefaced and foolish and this was the King's rôle for several years. Now, however, circumstances have altered and of course he is much less nervous when in the Queen's society."

Most important of all is the fact that henceforth the King really loves his wife, looks upon her as his own, feels deep gratitude towards her for the precious pledge of affection which she has given him, hopes, moreover, for others to come. He constantly tries to express his feelings, and even although he is still—indeed always will be—a trifle awkward in his protestations of affection, he is no longer, as of yore, an unhappy boy in terror of tears and scoldings but a lover who cannot bear to offend or displease his Beloved.

There was no such great change in Marie Antoinette. "She certainly has no love for her husband, and it would be strange if she had," says Vermond, but she is more approachable; she is no longer cold, negligent, disdainful; she consults the King occasionally about her little private affairs and her occupations and pleasures; she allows him to have a share in her daily life. She is a better wife than she has hitherto been and she is a perfect mother, endlessly occupied with her baby, watching over all its little illnesses, proudly detailing its infantile progress.

There will be more to say later on in this history of Marie Antoinette in her maternal rôle: what I want to call attention to now is the softening effect produced by this great event in her life. It is an accepted fact that, after the birth of her first child, she gradually begins to lead a more regular existence, and to occupy herself seriously. She is more careful to avoid anything that might give rise to scandal; her gay parties are less frequent, less lively; she often

rests. There is a great difference in her dress. Extravagance gives place to simplicity; sumptuous robes encrusted with precious stones are replaced by little linen frocks, and instead of feathers and plumes bunches and garlands of real flowers are worn. The Court follows her lead; each and all play at modesty, at simplicity. For the first time black garments are the fashion at Versailles. Old courtiers are amazed. "Have you lost a near relation?" "Oh no! I am in black not in mourning," is a scrap of dialogue to be found in a gossiping journal of the period. Another significant symptom is the decline of the Comte d'Artois' influence. He is often refused admission, his advice is neglected, and the Queen declares that she has the poorest opinion of him and his boon companions. Occasionally, it is true, she is imprudent. Gambling still goes on, though in more moderate fashion; there is still room for improvement. But it is a fact that actual dissipation is rare, and Marie Antoinette in a letter to her Mother quite truthfully declares that her "dear Mama may be very satisfied as to my conduct. If I was formerly to blame, it was because I was childish and giddy. Now, however, I am much more sensible, and I am very well aware of what my duty consists in."

It is only just to take into account this decided improvement, this striving after goodness and duty on the part of Marie Antoinette, and impartial posterity will render her her due. Unfortunately, this was not the case at the time. Her destiny was fixed, nothing could alter it. Evil tongues even assailed her motherhood, which had wrought such a happy change in her, and dared, according to the Comte de Provence, to see in it "a proof of her misconduct." The public, by means of Court gossip, was but too well aware of the King's long-continued coldness, the open indifference of the Queen, the separate existence led by the

Royal pair; accordingly, when matters began to follow a normal course, gossip was rife regarding the Queen. "Everything, even her maternal affection was turned against her, for it was asserted that a woman is always especially devoted to her love-child," the Comte de Provence declared, and the very day following that of her difficult and dangerous labour, in which she had so nearly lost her life, a horrible caricature was clandestinely distributed, which, according to a contemporary reporter, "all good Frenchmen should repulse with horror," but which, nevertheless, produced a vivid effect on the mob.

When, on the day of her Churching she drove through Paris to render thanks, according to custom, in the ancient Cathedral, she was received in such an icy, even such a hostile, manner that her tears fell fast. The years of folly were behind her; the years of sadness had begun.

CHAPTER V

THE HEART OF A QUEEN

A QUEEN who desires to be also a mere woman is greatly to be pitied. The results of Marie Antoinette's insatiable, albeit innocent, craving for pleasure, for easy goodfellowship with her chosen intimates, of her efforts to do away with the etiquette, the pomp, the splendid boredom of the Court, were indeed deplorable, but she will be in a yet more precarious position when she gives way to the natural emotions of her being and yearns to experience the joys of devoted friendship like other less exalted beings.

Marie Antoinette was very tender-hearted; she could not exist without friends; she was sentimental, emotional; deep down in her being she cherished, the pretty little blue flower, the German *Vergissmeinnicht*. A remark was once made in her presence to the effect that women in general are incapable of true friendship because they, at heart, desire only the more passionate emotions; Marie Antoinette was at once and surprisingly on the defensive. "If my heart," she exclaimed, "did not at once and absolutely deny such an assertion, I should think myself dead to my better self. Life is only worth living if one loves and has the hope of being loved in return"; and when the Revolution was raging, she wrote on the eve of the 10th of August 1792 to one of her friends: "They have deprived me of all except my heart, which will always be mine and will always love you. To be without this consolation would be the one unbearable misfortune."

The Court, her relations, her own domestic hearth were unlikely, as we have seen, to satisfy this craving for affection, indeed many of those around her were inimical to her. As for Louis, though she valued his kindness and was well aware of his real goodness, he and she were so utterly unlike each other in every way, that, at most, she merely felt esteem and respect for him. She, therefore, was determined to have friends; she had many, they gave her much happiness and more sorrow. The suffering, the sorrow, was not her fault. It was not altogether their's either, in spite of certain stupidities, certain mistakes which will in due course be referred to: in Marie Antoinette's high estate lay the whole crux of the situation. It is dangerous for a Queen, and for a Queen of France beyond all others, to be accessible to emotions which tend to bring her down to earth, for, as a contemporary of Marie Antoinette very pertinently observes: "The French nation, despite the frivolity of which it is accused, perhaps indeed by reason of this very frivolity, soon ceases to respect authority if it is despoiled of a certain austerity. Serious kindness, which overawes and prevents any familiarity is needful." The truth of this observation will soon be only too apparent.

Vermond, writing in 1776 and closely observing the Queen, remarks that up to now she has experienced only passing fancies, hardly worthy of the name of friendship. Indeed, from her first arrival in France to the moment when Madame de Polignac took possession of her heart, Marie Antoinette's sentiments towards those whom she chose to call her friends were merely superficial and roused by some fancy, some similarity of tastes or age, and the like. The first little tiff, the first disillusionment, the flight of time, sufficed to dissolve these so-called friendships with Mesdames de Pecquigny, de Saint-Mégrin, with Madame Dillon; even the intimacy with the charming

Princesse de Lamballe, suffered a temporary eclipse: to this faithful friend, however, the Queen grown wiser in misfortune ultimately returned. These several ladies must be briefly considered. The young Duchesse de Pecquigny, later Duchesse de Chartres, is the first of these favourites of a day. She was pretty, rather hoydenish in manner, and moreover amusing, and the Dauphine had been struck by her wit and by the fun she made of the unfortunate Comtesse du Barry. For about six months no one stood higher in Marie Antoinette's good graces. Then, however, the aspect of affairs changed. Court jealousy awoke; it was whispered to Marie Antoinette that she in her turn would serve as, nay perhaps was already serving as the butt of the witty Duchess. The Duc de Vauguyon, tutor to the Dauphin, was particularly successful in rousing the ire of the Princess and, when he had accomplished his end, he cleverly substituted his own daughter-in-law, Madame de Saint-Mégrin, for Madame de Pecquigny. The new favourite was quite as amusing as her predecessor and much more malicious and for a short time the Dauphine seemed to be taken with her. But Madame de Saint-Mégrin's reign was short; she showed her hand too openly, and when Marie Antoinette discovered that Madame du Barry and others were intriguing to make her new friend her lady-in-waiting, all was over, and the Duchesse de Saint-Mégrin's decline from favour was even more rapid than her rise had been.

The partiality shown for some time to the exquisite Comtesse Dillon, one of the ladies of the Queen's household, was founded on a real mutual understanding and might have been a lasting attachment. The tall, slim, most attractive young woman, with her charming face, her silvery voice and her gay, sweet nature, really attracted Marie Antoinette, and during the winter and spring of 1775–6 all the graces

and favours and pettings for which the whole Court pined were lavished on the Comtesse. Unfortunately for her, she possessed an ambitious, intriguing mother, a Madame de Rothe, who thought to profit by her daughter's advancement. She was forever urging her to ask favours and making indiscreet demands. The Queen took offence and a coldness ensued which was not, indeed, an open rupture, but which relegated the Comtesse to the position of the other ladies of the Household. A few years later, a revival of the old intimacy was cut short by the untimely death of the young Comtesse.

The Princesse de Lamballe, whose connexion with the Queen was the most lasting, though not the most absorbing of all the Queen's friendships, cannot be quite so summarily dismissed. At the time of Marie Antoinette's marriage, the daughter of the Prince de Savoie-Carignan, widow of the Prince de Lamballe, was about twenty-one years old. She lived at Versailles, in the house of her father-in-law, the Duc de Penthièvre, and her year of mourning having just expired, she had reappeared at Court. She was enchanting to look on, being almost ethereal in appearance, with delicate features, dazzling complexion and blue, childish, wondering eyes. Her movements were grace personified and in her elegant mauve half-mourning draperies, with her wonderful golden hair falling in ringlets on her shoulders, she presented a perfect picture of youth and innocence. She was not a clever woman, but she was always welcome in society by reason of her sweet temper, her unaffectedness and her pleasing habit of drawing out and agreeing with anyone with whom she chanced to be conversing. She was, moreover, fond of gaiety and of all the various amusements so dear to the heart of Marie Antoinette.

The two met for the first time during the Carnival of 1771 at the ball given in honour of the Dauphine

by Madame de Noailles and were at once mutually attracted to each other. Very soon they were together almost every day. Madame de Lamballe was Marie Antoinette's chosen companion at all times and seasons, and after the accession she became more than ever essential to the Queen's well-being. During the weeks of deep mourning following the death of Louis XV, she alone, with the brothers-in-law and their wives, was admitted to the Queen's apartments. She and her royal mistress were inseparable. One day Louis XVI said smilingly to his wife: "I am glad that Madame de Lamballe is always here—you are really fond of her?" "Oh! Sire, her friendship is the joy of my life!" On another day, when the Princess entered Marie Antoinette's *cabinet doré*, she was amazed to find her own portrait painted on one of the mirrors of the apartment. About this time the idea was formulated and carried out in the following year, of reviving the office of Superintendent of the Queen's household, with a view to installing Madame de Lamballe in the important position.

This was by no means an easy matter. The office had been created by Cardinal Mazarin for his niece Olympe Mancini, and had been suppressed in 1741 by Cardinal de Fleury at the death of Mademoiselle de Clermont. It was a heavy expense to the Treasury and dangerous to the Court, on account of the dissensions which it caused between the high officers of State. All the Ministers, Turgot in particular, opposed its revival for many months. But the Queen insisted, in fact, she was determined and in the end she got her own way. "I have asked the King," she writes to Rosenberg on July 13th 1775, "to choose Lamballe as Superintendent. You can fancy how pleased I am! I shall make my friend happy and be able to be more with her. This is a secret." Two months later the appointment was officially

announced. The salary, which had formerly amounted to 45,000 livres was raised to 150,000, and the Princesse de Lamballe seemed to be all in all to Marie Antoinette. In reality, however, her influence was already on the wane.

There are apparently many reasons for the gradual cooling down of the Queen's ardent affection. The Comte de Provence and Madame de Genlis suggest that Madame de Lamballe's somewhat limited intelligence ended by boring the Queen. Mercy, on the other hand asserts that the new Superintendent, who was prejudiced in many ways and moreover, egged on by her father-in-law, the Duc de Penthièvre, was the cause of little difficulties at Court—squabbles and gossip which were a source of worry to Marie Antoinette. She also was foolish enough to league herself against the Abbé de Vermond and she was, moreover, very friendly with the Duc de Chartres, to whom the Queen was openly antagonistic. These various reasons, very likely accelerated her fall from favour, but it is probable that Marie Antoinette would have ignored these venial offences had not a new, powerful, overwhelming attachment suddenly taken possession of her heart leaving no room therein for any other deep emotion. The real reason for Madame de Lamballe's fall from favour, was the Queen's deepening affection for Madame de Polignac.

The Princess was not immediately routed; for some time there was war to the knife between the rivals. Madame de Lamballe endeavoured to found a salon to which she invited those guests whom she knew would amuse the Queen. There were two parties at Court, each striving for the mastery. But the struggle was too unequal and was not long prolonged. The Princess soon saw that she was vanquished, neglected, forsaken; still treated, it is true, with a certain amount of consideration, but without any real affection, and

very soon the rarity of visits, the cutting short of interviews, the absence of any confidences made the position only too plain to the supplanted Favourite.

She bore the blow with perfect dignity, and as soon as she became fully aware of the inevitable, she resigned herself to her fate. She had always been delicate, and her health had by reason of these unfortunate occurrences, suffered a good deal of late. She had, therefore, a reasonable excuse gracefully to efface herself. She never complained, she forsook neither the Queen nor the Court, but she led a very retired existence and only appeared in public when her official duties obliged her to do so. That she suffered cruelly, there is, unfortunately, no doubt. She was of a very affectionate nature, extremely faithful and deeply, passionately devoted to Marie Antoinette. Her affection for the Queen was not destroyed by all that had occurred, she cherished it silently in her heart and in the supreme hour of need the Princesse de Lamballe was at her Sovereign's side, loving, devoted, faithful, even unto death.

The summer of the year 1775 saw the beginning of Marie Antoinette's intimacy with Madame de Polignac. The Queen was in a sentimental mood and her girlish friendships which had hitherto amused and enlivened existence, no longer satisfied the sensitive, isolated woman who at twenty years of age found herself without an intimate friend, capable of affording any real moral support. She longed to be able to be perfectly open, to confide in some kindred spirit. Recent disappointments and vexations had increased her loneliness and as Saint-Priest observes: "she sought for a friend as carefully as she would have sought to fill a vacant position in her household." At this critical moment Madame de Polignac chanced to cross her path and seemed, at first glance, specially created to fulfil all her desires. First impressions

were never more correct than in this instance, for at the end of fifteen years' time, the bonds of friendship between Marie Antoinette and her friend were increasingly close and tender. The initial stages of this romantic attachment must be briefly indicated. In 1775 Yolande de Polastrin, who had been married in 1767 to the Comte Jules de Polignac, was twenty-six years old. She and her husband were poor, generations of extravagance having brought ruin upon an illustrious and powerful house. They lived nearly all the year round at a little country place in Picardy and when they came to Versailles, they inhabited a very modest apartment in the Rue Fortisson, seldom going to Court, until the Comtesse Diane de Polignac, Count Jules' sister, became lady-in-waiting to the Comtesse d'Artois, and took up her abode in the Palace. Yolande de Polignac, when visiting her sister-in-law, made the acquaintance of the Comtesse d'Artois and the Princesse de Lamballe, who were both struck with her charm and were only too anxious to get her to come to their receptions. In their salons she naturally met the Queen and one day Her Majesty had a long conversation with Comtesse Jules and was delighted with her and eager to meet her again. Thus, very easily and simply, began the intimacy between Madame de Polignac and the exalted being, who very soon only looked on life through the eyes of her friend.

Several existing portraits of Yolande de Polignac show her as a very pretty woman, but none, according to Madame de Genlis, do justice to her charming, seductive personality. She was not perfectly beautiful, her forehead was rather too high, and her complexion was rather dark, but such slight imperfections were forgotten in the charming whole ; when she spoke and smiled with her tiny, scarlet mouth, her slightly retroussé nose, her pretty blue eyes and her wavy, black hair, which looked as though it had " been dyed

in ink." Her manners were easy and graceful and her gentle, sweet expression of countenance resembled, according to a contemporary writer, certain of Raphael's Madonnas. She, moreover, possessed an exquisite, caressing tone of voice, which captivated all who heard it. She walked and danced well, with a sort of careless grace. A man who knew her and who, following the custom of the period, was present at her morning toilet, thus gives his impression of the famous Comtesse. "She had just risen and was attired in a snow-white négligé. She had a rose in her hair and was sitting before her mirror, which, reflecting her features, doubled, so to say, her charm. She looked like a princess playing at being a shepherdess and if she had limped but a very little, she would have very much resembled the Duchesse de la Vallière, indeed she was more strictly beautiful, but not quite so tender and languishing in appearance."

She was not extraordinarily clever, but she was sensible, she had good judgment and her simplicity, her lightheartedness, her easy good temper made her a most pleasant companion. She was generous, sensitive and pure-minded and without personal greed and ambition, but she was easily influenced and, most unfortunately for Marie Antoinette she was devoted to her family and to her friends and soon became the docile instrument of those among them who, through her influence, sought to advance themselves at Court. One cannot too deeply deplore the unfortunate circumstance, that the Queen, who had no leaning towards intrigue, should have made a bosom friend of a woman, with a strong resemblance to herself, who by reason of her easy good nature, was perpetually at the mercy of a few unscrupulous and clever men, who made use of her as a tool in all their ambitious schemes and plans.

The mischief began in the Queen's ideas and methods of practising friendship. She overdid her

part, by seeing the Comtesse every day, often several times a day, going out alone with her on foot, or driving, taking her to the Trianon and spending whole afternoons *tête-à-tête* with her there, sitting at her bedside whenever she was ill, nay, even when Madame de Polignac's child was born, moving the Court to La Muette, in order that she might be at hand to take care of her friend. Naturally murmurs arose, but this was not the worst of it. That the Queen should admit her friend into her innermost circle was, after all, most natural, but on the contrary, it was the Queen who entered the circle of Madame de Polignac, and adopted *her* friends, the greater part of whom were moreover, the friends and adherents of Choiseul. Here we have a fertile field for all manner of intrigue, as is clearly indicated by the mere mention of the Baron de Breteuil the Duc de Guines, the Comte de Vaudrenil, the Comte d'Adhémar, and last, but not least, the Baron de Besenval, a very old acquaintance of the de Polignacs, who, according to Saint-Preist, "was devoted in his attendance at the little clique, as soon as he had taken in its full importance."

In this circle of clever people, who were to all appearance friendly to each other and who were constantly in each other's society, "confidence and freedom reigned" according to Marie Antoinette. Madame de Polignac, who had simple tastes and was not fond of any kind of constraint, had introduced a sort of easy, graceful familiarity, which delighted the Queen, who copied her friend in everything and speedily decided to dispense with every vestige of etiquette. She would sit on a sofa in the salon with all the guests standing about, talking and amusing themselves as they pleased. A card-table, a piano, a billiard-table were all at the visitors' disposal. All sorts of games and charades were enjoyed. The Queen felt absolutely happy and at her ease. "I can be myself," she

declared joyfully, and she spent nearly all her time with the Comtesse. The new order of things hastened, nay completed the exodus of those who had formerly adorned the Court and in the estimation of the general public the ' Queen of France ' figured as the " Captive of a Coterie."

During the inital stages of her intimacy with the Queen and until a splendid suite of apartments was allotted to her at Versailles, Madame de Polignac, her own accommodation being somewhat limited for the reception of company, was accustomed to entertain of an evening in the salon of her friend, the Princesse de Rohan-Guéméné, who was governess to the royal children and high in the Queen's favour. This lady was a daughter of the Maréchal de Sonbise, she was separated from her husband, and living openly with the Duc de Coigny, her reputation at Versailles, was therefore, despite her high rank, inevitably somewhat doubtful. She was eccentric and kind-hearted and always had about her a quantity of dogs which she declared were her intermediaries with the spiritual world, sometimes in the midst of a really witty conversation, she would stop short, fall into a kind of ecstasy, then proceed to describe her visions and be deeply offended if her audience seemed incredulous. A very mixed assembly frequented her salon; young persons of both sexes, discontented politicians, fast men of the world, women of doubtful reputation, were there to be seen, hob-nobbing with individuals of the very highest rank and splendour. High play was usual, there was unlimited chatter on every possible topic, little intrigues were, according to Mercy Argenteau, rife beneath the apparently careless gaiety. Unfortunately it all suited the Queen perfectly. She would arrive several times a week towards eleven o'clock in the evening and join Madame de Polignac and her friends. Naturally all paid court to her and flattered

her, only subjects she cared for were discussed, anything serious or difficult being carefully avoided, and, in the congenial atmosphere, she was soon able to shake off the effects of any vexations or fatigues she might have encountered during the day.

In October 1782 there came a dramatic change in the situation. The Prince de Guéméné who was heavily in debt, failed suddenly for an enormous sum, many were involved with him, the scandal was great and he was ordered to leave the Court. His wife came in for her full share of his disgrace, she was forced to resign her position of Governess to the Children of France and retired to a distant country seat belonging to the Prince de Soubise.

Who should fill her place? The Princesse de Chimay, the Duchesse de Duras, and other suitable personages were named, when, unluckily the Baron de Besenval, inveterate busybody and mischiefmaker, interfered in the matter. He went to the Queen and asked point blank what was the meaning of the rumour current in Paris that Madame de Polignac was to replace Madame de Guéméné. "The Queen stopped," said Besenval, and looking at me as though I had suggested something utterly unexpected and novel, she was silent for a second or so, then she said: "What! Madame de Polignac? I thought you knew her better. She would not care for the position, she has always declined any that I have offered her in my household." But the Baron urged and entreated, insisting that by Marie Antoinette's nominating her dearest friend as her children's governess, a most excellent effect would be produced and in the end, after some resistance, the Queen was talked over, the Favourite agreed to accept the position, the King's consent was gained and all was finally settled.

It was a most fatal mistake. Up to now Madame de Polignac had been simply and solely the Queen's

friend, with no official rank, and herein lay her strength and her title of respect. However much Marie Antoinette might have been criticized for adopting her friend's manners and habits at least Madame de Polignac had hitherto been merely the passive recipient of the Queen's favours, she was not a great Court functionary on an equality with the members of those illustrious houses which held the monopoly of the offices of State. From this moment, however, the great nobles were her sworn enemies, and more disastrous still, the nation at large strongly resented the fact that the Children of France—the Dauphin more particularly—should be given into the care of a woman who was considered to have an evil influence over the Queen and who was excessively unpopular.

The unpopularity of the Favourite was due to various causes and was certainly more her many friends' fault than her own. She was incapable of refusing anything to anyone, the Queen, for her part, refused *her* nothing. Hence all the mischief. The Comte de Provence states this fact and urges by way of excuse that the Queen's chief happiness lay in making others happy and that she, like all the rest of the world had been accustomed to consider the resources of the French treasury inexhaustible. This is very true, still her attitude is a somewhat selfish one, not, indeed, that inhuman kind of selfishness which has no sort of compassion for the unfortunate, but rather that refined kind of selfishness, which seeks to gratify the desires of others at any cost, because it is disagreeable to say "No," because it is unpleasant to hurt people's feelings. "I like my friends to leave me feeling happy," said Marie Antoinette, one day. Madame de Polignac probably frequently said and felt the same and consequently both were incessantly occupied in gratifying the vain ambitions, the extortionate demands of those around them.

Who are the chief actors in the crowd of place-hunters? First and foremost must be named the Comte de Vaudrenil who was still young, handsome, very distinguished-looking, very witty and singularly charming in manner. "There are only two men in France who really understood how to talk to women; Lekain on the stage and Vaudrenil in society," the Princesse d'Hénin was wont to declare. Alas! he was also most ambitious, insatiable in his demands for himself and his creatures and was also extremely hot-tempered, no one dared to arouse his wrath and Madame de Polignac, in particular, who was excessively fond of him, was his devoted slave. He was always interfering and demanding favours and if his wishes were not immediately granted, there would be terrible scenes, after which, the Queen would find her friend dissolved in tears, which she naturally hastened to dry. One of the scandals which made Court gossip was the salary of 30,000 livres accorded to Vaudrenil out of the Royal treasury. The Comte d'Artois, moreover, made him a present of a country estate, he also had rooms in the Palace of Versailles, situated just beneath Madame de Polignac's apartments.

The able Comte d'Adhémar achieved much the same success in a more skilful manner. He was poor, bore the somewhat obscure name of Montfalcon and for long he existed in a provincial town. Then, fortunate genealogical researches procured him a more resounding title, he married a rich widow, his handsome face, his pleasant manners, his friendship with Vaudrenil, made the rest easy. He knew Madame de Polignac well and soon won the Queen's favour. He declared that success was usually to be gained by flattering women and that they always obtained for him all that he desired, and he certainly gave striking proof of the truth of this assertion, when, in spite of tremendous opposition, he caused himself to be nominated Ambassa-

dor at the Court of St James. The Ministry had absolutely refused his request, but Madame de Polignac implored and Marie Antoinette insisted, so Louis XVI gave way and the general public grumbled discreetly.

The ambitions of the unscrupulous Comte de Guines were even more excessive. Having by sheer audacity succeeded in dominating the Polignac salon and the Queen's own particular circle, he decided that he would be able to oust Maurepas and put himself at the head of the Government. But he showed his hand too soon and one day his peremptory manner offended the Queen. He never regained favour and he had to retire with a duchy and the gloomy satisfaction of knowing that at least he had had a large share in planning Turgot's disgrace.

Finally, the Baron de Besenval, that eccentric individual, who has already on more than one occasion, figured in these pages, must, by no means be forgotten, in this attempt at describing the chief figures of the Polignac clique. He was of Swiss extraction, but in temperament he was a swaggering, boasting Gascon, not anxious for his own advancement but constantly on the look out for his friends of both sexes. Always hoping for a chance of awarding some important post, of pushing forward some person or another, he was more dangerous (despite his real honesty) than a whole host of born intriguers would have been.

In this pernicious atmosphere, amid the rapacious, crowd, moved Madame de Polignac, apparently ever calm, serene and indifferent. It was said of her that she never asked anything for herself, preferring that what she desired should be " offered to her." This is, however, an all-natured and not wholly fair assertion. Yolande de Polignac was really sincerely disinterested and would assuredly have been content with the Queen's affection alone, without grasping at material advantages had she not, unfortunately, been over-

powered by her connections. Her sister-in-law, the Comtesse Diane de Polignac (who though neither young nor beautiful, was clever and ambitious) in particular had immense sway over her. Comtesse Diane was at first in the household of the Comtesse d'Artois, afterwards she became lady-in-waiting to Madame Elizabeth, the King's sister. She insidiously and cautiously suggested to the Queen all manner of ideas and plans which would benefit her own nearest relations and it was through her influence that they contrived to secure that extraordinary accumulation of honours and worldly goods which is duly chronicled in the history of Versailles and which was well calculated alas ! to arouse public indignation.

Count Jules de Polignac was made a duke and without further entering into somewhat tedious details, Mercy Argenteau's statement made in 1779 may be given here. He says that " the Famille Polignac, without having been of any use whatever to the State and out of pure favouritism has already benefited annually, by more than 500,000 livres." Louis XVI seems to approve, for he, like the Queen, is fond of Madame de Polignac, he sees her good qualities, and is pleased with her intimacy with Marie Antoinette. Maurepas, for his part, shuts his eyes to what is going on, because he trusts that his own tottering position may be strengthened by means of the Favourite, and so the abuses continue and the Royal Treasury is apparently inexhaustible.

But the most pressing danger to Queen and country caused by the powerful Clique which holds the Court is the perpetual interference of the Queen's " Society " —to give it it's popular title—in State affairs and in French political matters. The Queen's friends see everything from the personal point of view. The question is, not, whether such and such a minister be honestly striving for the good of the State, but

whether he be favourable or not to the aims of the "Society." This is much too important a matter to be cursorily dismissed in this chapter, in which it is only needful to draw attention to the terrible blame incurred by Marie Antoinette, because she was apparently largely responsible for the blighted hopes, the many failures, the final bankruptcy of the Reign.

In about ten years' time public exasperation against the Polignac coterie assumes alarming proportions and the angry muttering of the mob becomes an audible growl of fury which dismally heralds the approaching storm. At the Théâtre-Français an actor called Dugazon, who is taking a comic part in one of Collé's plays, has to declaim a long tirade against the Favourite of Marie de Medicis. He audaciously substitutes "la Signora Polignaqui" for the lady's real name and is vociferously applauded by the whole house. That same year, the Comtesse de Tessé, one of the Queen's ladies, is mistaken for Madame de Polignac on the road to Versailles, is set upon by a crowd of roughs, and only escapes knocking about by her being able to prove that she is not the person they are looking out for. One night, the Queen herself, on arriving at the Opera is greeted with hostile groans and hisses: "Voilà Madame Déficit" shout a few vulgarians, and the audience, by general laughter, shows that it is in sympathy with the insolent attack. The Queen deeply wounded, complains bitterly to the young Comte de Tilly. "What harm have I done them?" she says, weeping, and as he tries to soothe her: "What is the use of fine phrases when one has nothing to reproach oneself with: it is too hard!"

But, as a matter of fact ,the Queen has for some time realised her position, and is well aware of the harm her friends are doing her. She tries occasionally to resist their influence, their insatiable greed. "Neces-

sity," says Mercy in 1787, "has at last put a stop to pillage and the Queen no longer accedes to imprudent extortions." Indeed, she has lost very many of her cherished illusions. One day La Marck notices with surprise the preference she shows to some foreign visitors to the Palace and observes that the French habitués will probably be offended. "Yes, I think you are right," she answers sadly, "but, anyhow, these people do not want anything of me." It is remarked at Court, that she is less sweet-tempered than formerly, that she is not so affectionate to her particular friends, that she often makes bitter little speeches. "She used to be Venus with her adoring Loves, but now, she is more like Juno, ready to torment and chastise!" observes a member of her household. Madame de Polignac, herself, does not always get off easily, there are sometimes lively discussions and disputes between her and her Royal mistress, in which, however, the Queen is always the one to yield; on one such occasion she said to La Marck: "Madame de Polignac is really good at heart, and she loves me, but she is influenced by those around her." Habit and affection alike kept Marie Antoinette faithful to her friend and according to the Comte de Tilly: "the friendship between the Queen and Madame de Polignac was like a fine day, sometimes clouded and overcast, but which always ended in a beautiful evening." How impossible at this date to foresee the tempest in which the beautiful day would end at last!

Is it likely that an impressionable affectionate heart such as the Queen's was always content with *friendship?* Did it never vibrate more strongly—more passionately—more dangerously? This is indeed a very delicate subject, nd if I am venturing fearlessly upon it, it is because I honestly believe that I can do so without in any way tarnishing the fair name of

Marie Antoinette. It is very true that spiteful contemporaries did not spare her, indeed the list of those who were commonly reported to be her lovers, is a long one. However, mere gossip in a case of this kind, is not sufficient; definite proofs and indications and accredited witnesses are necessary. Here we find nothing of the sort. Some of the names in the list are supported by no evidence at all, in the case of others, again, it is so slight, so trivial, that on examination it at once breaks down. I shall not pause here for long, a very few words will effectually dispose of many of the so-called lovers.

I have already referred to the absurd myth concerning the Comte d'Artois, that lively brother-in-law, who amused the Queen in her early youth, who was her playfellow, her companion, but who never won either her affection or her esteem. In the same category may be placed Comte Esterhazy, a clever, very ugly man; the Queen liked his frankness, but she merely felt a sort of kindly friendship towards him, nothing more. The attractive, witty Duc de Coigny, seemed for a time to be a very special favourite; soon, however, a sort of easy good fellowship—a kind of innocent flirtation (it was never anything else) was put a stop to by Court gossip and jealousies.

Édouard Dillon—"le beau Dillon" as he was called at Versailles—was the hero of an incident which made talk at the time. Whilst dancing a quadrille with the Queen, he suddenly became ghastly pale, stumbled heavily and fell unconscious. He was carried to a sofa and the Queen in great alarm, laid her hand on his heart to see if it were still beating. It was nothing but a fainting fit, probably induced by the heat or an old wound and he soon recovered, but all had observed Marie Antoinette's impulsive action and when, soon afterwards Édouard Dillon was seen returning to Versailles in one of the Queen's carriages after a

hunting accident, in which he had broken his arm, he was declared to be the "favori en titre." . . . Nothing further occurred, however, and soon gossip died down; but the affair was not forgotten.

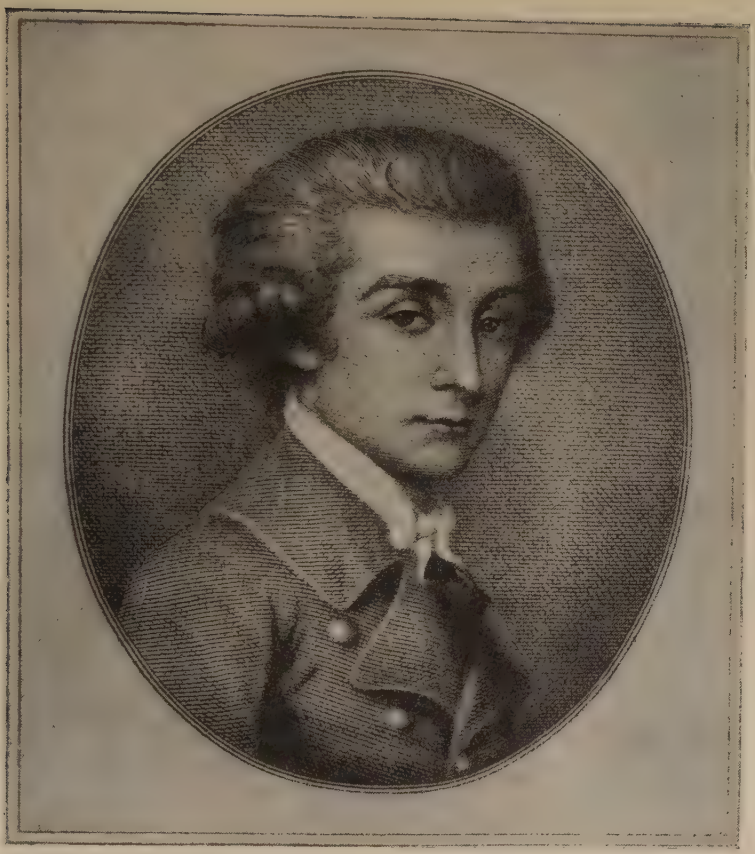
Finally there is Lauzun, the avowed seducer, the Don Juan of Versailles, held by Marie Antoinette (according to his own boasting memoirs) in such affection that she never met him without evincing signs of the liveliest emotion. At the chase, at balls, everywhere and always she longs for his presence; he is almost embarrassed by her languishing glances, and one day she actually embraces him. . . . He, however, never forgets the "great respect" which is due to the Queen of France, although, he proceeds to say: "By her attitude, she desired much more from me than mere respect." Unfortunately for Lauzun, other and more apparently truthful Memoirs, describe him as imploring the Queen to help him to pay his debts, and also as making a most audacious declaration, to be received by offended Majesty with an indignant: "Sortez, Monsieur!"—and he retires from the presence a humiliated and furious man. It would be merely foolish to hesitate between the presumptuous assertions of an embittered fop and the more reasonable accounts of disinterested witnesses, and Lauzun's Memoirs may be safely dismissed as having been prompted by sordid motives of revenge.

One is thankful to be done with all this boudoir gossip and tittle-tattle and to touch at last upon the idyllic episode which seems in this melancholy history, to resemble a spring of pure water welling up in an arid, sandy waste. Here there is no vestige of intrigue, of vanity, of personal ambition, but pure, ardent, unselfish devotion, perfect confidence and reciprocated trust and affection. In the course of the last few years the discovery of valuable documents has shed fresh light upon the romance of Marie Antoinette and the

Comte de Fersen, it is therefore comparatively easy to follow the principal events of the simple, pathetic story.

Jean-Axel de Fersen, son of the Field Marshal de Fersen, member of an old Swedish family, was first presented to the Dauphine on January 10th 1774 at the New Year's Ball which she was holding at Versailles. He was then nineteen years of age, just two months older than Marie Antoinette. He was a slim, tall, graceful youth, with a dreamy, romantic cast of countenance. Fair-haired, with clear blue eyes, regular features, and most charming manners, he was, according to Madame de Boigne, "beautiful as an angel." The less ecstatic Duc de Lévis says: "His face and his manner were quite those of the hero of a novel, not, however, of a *French* novel." This remark may be taken as inferring that Fersen, a typical son of the north, romantic, dreamy, ardent, was through a sort of mystical idealism combined with inherited instinct, inclined to platonic friendships and long, hopeless passions. Cold at first, "circumspect in men's society, and reserved with women," grave, without being dull, Fersen, the Duc adds, was fond of serious conversation, in which he displayed "more sense than wit." In short, anyone more unlike the frivolous, effeminate, cynical young noblemen who fluttered around Marie Antoinette at the Court of Versailles cannot possibly be imagined; she was naturally struck by the contrast; very soon she was deeply interested in the young Swedish gentleman, and she ended by becoming sincerely devoted to him.

Fersen in his Diary has singularly little to say about his first meeting with Marie Antoinette. "I went to the ball given by Madame la Dauphine, which, as usual, began at five o'clock and ended at half-past nine, when I at once returned to Paris." On the 30th of the same month there is an interview at the ball held at



COUNT AXEL FERSEN

[*face p. 126*

the Opera House. "Madame la Dauphine talked to me for some time before I recognised her; when at length she unmasked, every one pressed round her, and she took refuge in her box; at three o'clock I left the ball." During the ensuing weeks such casual *rencontres* were frequent, and it was reported at Versailles that the Dauphine and the "handsome Swede" were on several occasions apparently much interested in each other's conversation. At least this much is indicated in the following quotation from a letter written by the Comte de Creutz to Gustavus III: "The young Comte de Fersen has been extremely well received by the Royal Family. His conduct has been absolutely discreet and decorous. With his handsome face and his charming manner he was almost bound to succeed in Society and he certainly has done so."

Louis XV died on May 10th 1774 and the Dauphine became Queen of France. Two days later Fersen left Paris to take up his abode in London. This sudden move on his part has been taken to indicate that a tender feeling, which moreover he knew to be reciprocated, had already taken possession of his heart and that he thus discreetly retired from Court in order to prevent any malicious gossip concerning the new Queen. There is, however, no authority for such a suggestion—indeed, it appears to be altogether confuted by the fact that Fersen, whilst in London, was a suitor for the hand of the wealthy heiress, Catherine Lyall, who however refused to marry him. "It is all over my dear," he writes from London to his sister: "the parents received me very kindly, but the daughter has refused me. I pressed my suit, nevertheless, but she replied that the grief of leaving her parents would be too great. I know well what I am losing, but I should easily console myself were I but sure that my father would do likewise." Only in August 1778 did Fersen return to France, with the

hope of entering the French army, his intention being to proceed to Normandy to join the Maréchal de Broglie, who was in command there. He stopped at Versailles on his way in order to be presented to the royal family. "The Queen, who is charming," he writes to his father, "exclaimed when she saw me, '*Ah! it is an old acquaintance!*' The other members of the family did not address one word to me." When the military operations in Normandy were over, he settled in Paris and became an assiduous frequenter of the Court. The great romance of his life had begun in earnest.

In the beginning of September 1778 the Queen, who was then in a delicate state of health (Madame Royale was born in the following December, and this circumstance ought certainly to remove any suspicion of coquetry on her part), was exceedingly kind to the young Swedish gentleman, as he naïvely informs his father, "The Queen, who is the prettiest and sweetest princess imaginable has been good enough to frequently ask about me. She asked Creutz why I did not come to her card-table on Sundays, and when she was informed that I had gone on one occasion, when there was no play, she actually made me a kind of apology. She is, very perceptibly, in an interesting condition." A few months later he writes: "The Queen is always gracious; I often go to pay my respects and she always receives me most kindly." It was about this time that Marie Antoinette expressed a wish to see him dressed in his Swedish uniform, which was, according to all accounts, excessively becoming: "I am to go, thus attired, not to Court, but to the Queen," he writes. He was present at all the friendly parties given by Madame de Lamballe and Madame de Polignac, and took part in the Queen's little musical gathering and in the excursions to the Trianon. By degrees, tender admiration and over-

powering affection begin to awaken in his heart, and his feelings are not hidden from the object of his secret adoration—indeed she smiles upon him indulgently.

There is a pretty story relating to this period to the effect that one day Marie Antoinette at her harpsichord sang the well-known refrain from *Didon:*

"Ah! que je fus bien inspirée
Quand je vous reçus dans ma cour,"

gazing meanwhile tearfully and tenderly at Fersen. Unfortunately the Opera *Didon* was first given in 1783, or five years later, which is rather disconcerting. Authentic testimony as to the Queen's sentiments, however, is to be found in a confidential letter dated April 10th 1779 from the Comte de Creutz to Gustavus III. "I beg to inform your Majesty," he writes, "that the young Comte de Fersen has been so well received by the Queen as to give offence to various individuals. I must confess that I am obliged to believe that she has a liking for him. The Comte has throughout been admirably restrained and modest in his conduct, and his decision to go to America is most praiseworthy. In departing he has avoided all perils, and he evidently possesses a strength of mind far in advance of his years in thus surmounting such a temptation." Fersen, indeed, becoming aware of the harmful suspicions of which his adored one was the object, appreciating as well to the full the evil that would arise from such suspicions, suddenly stoically decided to tear himself away from happiness and to join Rochambeau's expedition to America. It was a sad parting. The Queen, according to Creutz, could not take her eyes off her friend during the last few days, and "as she gazed on him they constantly filled with tears, but I beg your Majesty to keep this very secret." This same Creutz has handed down to us Fersen's so often quoted reply as follows: "When the Comte's depar-

ture was decided on, all the favourites were delighted, and the Duchesse de Fitz-James said to him: 'What, Monsieur! Can you thus forsake your conquest? Had I made one I would never forsake it,' he replied: 'I depart a free man, and alas! I leave no regrets behind me.' Your Majesty will agree that this speech shows wisdom and prudence far in advance of his age."

The exile of the young Swede lasted three years, three years of patiently endured danger, hardship, and silent sadness. In letters written to his sister during the campaign there is no allusion to the emotions which lay deep hidden in his breast; but, when peace being declared, there is talk of rewarding him with a commission in the French Army, the delight with which he welcomed the idea, the memories which it evoked, the hopes which it inspired, may be better imagined than described. "If this happens," he cries, "I shall be the happiest of men; if it does not happen the unhappiest. My dear sister, pray persuade my father to give his consent—he would make me happy for life." To obtain this favour Gustavus III wrote to Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette warmly seconded the request. "The recommendation," she informs the King of Sweden, "has been received in the manner befitting its author, Your Majesty, and in favour of so good a subject." Success with such an advocate is a foregone conclusion. Fersen is appointed Colonel of the Royal Swedish regiment and his joy is great. "I can hardly believe it," he writes to his sister. "I am extraordinarily happy. I have more than one reason to be so; I will tell you all when we meet."

When Fersen was once more in Paris in the year 1783 and had installed himself in a charming house in the Rue Matignon, he was seen to be greatly changed in appearance. He looked much older, and, according to Madame de Boigne, he had lost much of his former

beauty; perhaps, however, these signs of suffering and care made him even more attractive than before, and evidently this was Marie Antoinette's opinion. Probably, too, she felt more sure of herself, and she was, moreover, absolutely convinced that she could with safety depend upon Fersen's discretion—on his constancy—on the unselfish purity of his devotion. In any case, she seems henceforth to have openly shown her affection for him. She often receives him alone and has long *tête-à-tête* conversations with him; she confides in him; she grants him all that it is in her power to honourably bestow. Doubtless this was the sweetest, the most blissful time of their lives. "He breathed only for her," says a contemporary writer, "and all his arrangements were contrived so as to compromise her as little as possible."

That his love was returned seems evident in reading the outpourings of Fersen's heart as disclosed in his recently discovered letters to his much-loved sister Sophie Piper. "I begin to be a little happier because occasionally I am able to see my dear one in her own apartments, and that is some consolation for all the many trials she has to endure. She is an angel of goodness, a true heroine of courage and deep feeling. No one ever before loved like this." Two years later, in 1785, he writes: "Here is the hair you asked me for. If there be not enough, I will send you some more. It is she herself who sends it to you and your desire in the matter touched her deeply, she is so kind, so perfect, and I seem to love her all the more since she loves you. I should never die content without your having seen her!"

Marie Antoinette, indeed—and herein is to be found another token of the innocence of her affection for Fersen—was most anxious to make Sophie's acquaintance and frequently thought out plans to bring her to Paris. Though the longed-for meeting never comes to

pass, the Queen does not forget her friend's sister. When Sophie's little daughter is dangerously ill, Fersen writes as follows: "She sends you a thousand messages and tenderly shares your sorrow; she weeps over it with me; you can fancy how I love her!" The bond between the lovers is so strong, so firm, that Fersen is well aware that his destiny is fixed, fixed indeed to his last day on earth and he declares to his confidant. "I have made up my mind never to marry. . . . I cannot give myself to the only woman I desire, to the only woman who really loves me, therefore I will give myself to no one."

The Queen kept up a frequent correspondence with her friend, of which a large portion has been published by Fersen's great nephew, M. de Klinchowström. These letters are political and refer exclusively to the period of the Revolution; others, more intimate in tone, have, so it is said, been suppressed out of posthumous delicacy, and this well-intentioned act may very possibly have done no good to the Queen's memory. Only one fragment which was probably written in 1791 has escaped the regrettable destruction: I give it here for the benefit of the curious; it is in Marie Antoinette's handwriting. "I want to tell you that I love you and I have hardly time even for that. I am well, do not be anxious about me, I wish I knew that you were the same. . . . Tell me where to address any letters I may be able to write to you; I cannot exist without this. Adieu, most beloved, most loving of men. I embrace you with my whole heart."

This certainly reads much like a love-letter; however, the fashionable sentimental phraseology of the time must be borne in mind; moreover, these lines were penned during the very height of the Revolution, when Fersen was perpetually risking his life in his efforts to save the Royal family. This letter, therefore, ought not to be used as an argument against Fersen's

confidences to his sister, against the convictions of all those who have been able to acquire the real facts concerning the story; against the staunchly upheld and widely spread belief of all the descendants of the Swedish gentleman's family. Were more definite proof desired, it would be found in certain letters included in the packet of documents regarding the flight to Varennes which are addressed to Fersen by some unknown woman who was apparently his mistress; they contain some bitter allusions to his former liaisons, but they refer to his attitude towards the Queen of France as being "respectful and devoted" and moreover, that he "cherishes her the more because she is unfortunate."

In 1787 Fersen was recalled to his native land by the war which had broken out between Sweden and Russia. Henceforth his visits to France were few and far between, and after the outbreak of the Revolution they were altogether clandestine and undertaken for the sake of furthering secret missions. His behaviour, his zeal, his courage, his unfailing devotion during that period of horrible torture will be described in due course; at present we are merely concerned with the proofs of a mutual affection which danger made only the more enduring. During the fateful days of October 1789 Fersen is there, ready to sacrifice himself, to save the Queen, or to perish at her side. He it is who, two years later, plans the flight to Varennes, who succeeds in getting the fugitives safely out of the Capital, and who then rides furiously ahead to await them at the frontier; to him Marie Antoinette despatches that little note which informs him that though the attempt has failed, her life at least is safe. "Be comforted, we are alive!" The following day she writes again; "I exist, but it is by a miracle: the 20th was an awful day!"

On one final occasion, in February 1792, Fersen

contrived to steal, disguised, into the Tuileries; he came under a false name, dressed as a courier, with a huge wig. It was his last interview with the Queen. But they corresponded constantly and in all sorts of ways, sometimes in cipher, sometimes under assumed names, sometimes letters were hidden in cases of tea or boxes of sweets, or sewn into the lining of a hat. Once the Queen sent him the following message through Esterhazy: "Tell him that time and distance cannot separate hearts!" She entrusts Esterhazy with a ring: "Give it him from me; I have worn it for two whole days before enclosing it; be sure to tell him that it is from me." Finally, in February 1793, in writing to Esterhazy she sends a seal, with the following explanation: "This impression is of quite a different nature. I want you to hand it to the individual who, as you know, came from Brussels to see me last winter, and you must tell him that there was never a more truthful device." Unfortunately, the seal has disappeared, but it is easy to imagine what must have been its tender trustful significance.

Fersen's letters to his sister, Comtesse Piper, vividly portray his feelings of despair at the news of the Queen's imprisonment and of her trial. "I am more dead than alive, to suffer as I suffer is not to live. . . . I would give my life to save her and cannot do so; my greatest happiness would be to die for her and I am denied this happiness. . . . I am always thinking of her; I cannot forgive myself the free air I breathe." And, when all is over, after the catastrophe, who could read without emotion these sorrowful incoherent phrases, vibrating with the love which for so long has been his happiness and of which he is now finally bereft: "Ah! pity me, pity me. I have lost everything in the world. . . . She who made my happiness, she for whom I existed—yes, my dear Sophie, for I have never ceased to love her. No—I

could not; never for one moment could I cease to love her; for her I would have sacrificed my all. She whom I loved so dearly, for whom I would have given a thousand lives, is no more! My sorrow is overwhelming, I do not know how I am to live and bear it. All is over for me. Why was I not permitted to die at her side; why could I not shed my blood for her? My heart will never cease to bleed. Weep with me, my dearest Sophie. . . . God have mercy upon me! To think of her, to regret her, therein lies my consolation; to seek all that I can find of her and treasure it is all I live for—truly, herein I find my only consolation. Her loss will be the grief of my whole life. . . . I love her more than ever."

He kept his word. What remained to him of life was almost wholly devoted to sorrowful memories, and so the years wore on until the 20th of June 1810 when the chivalrous friend of Marie Antoinette—like her, the victim of a furious mob—was murdered in the streets of Stockholm, strangely enough on the anniversary of that fatal flight to Varennes, which had definitely marked the head of his adored lady for the axe of the executioner.

This in brief, is the story of that pure, romantic attachment, which endured for fifteen long years and which was invariably distinguished by devoted heroism on the one side, by infinite sweetness and gratitude on the other. It is all to the honour of Marie Antoinette that she loved truly once during her lifetime and that the object of her affections was such a man as Jean Axel, Comte de Fersen.

CHAPTER VI

THE QUEEN AND THE MINISTERS

It is an accepted theory, and one that is adopted by all Marie Antoinette's biographers with very few exceptions, that she had a disgust and horror of politics, that she took part in them under protest, as it were, and when urged and pressed to do so by the entreaties of those around her; and the following passage from Madame Campan's *Memoirs* is frequently quoted in support of this theory. "Ah!" the Queen said to me, sighing deeply, "there is no more happiness for me, now that I have been obliged to take part in intrigues. Queens of France are happy only when they interfere in nothing!"

There is a certain amount of truth, not however (as is so often the case) the whole truth, in this accepted theory. It is a fact that the Queen did not care for business and for State business in particular, because she disliked making any sustained attempt at serious concentration of mind or brain. Her mother had many misgivings on this point, and on the very day after Louis' accession to the Throne, Maria Theresa declared that she feared the nonchalance of her daughter, her distaste for all serious occupations, and her tendency to avoid anything likely to demand any effort on her part. "I doubt," she says, "if she will ever do much with political matters—her want of method will always be against her." Shortly afterwards we find Prince Xavier de Saxe, a well-informed witness, confirming the Empress's opinion in the following words: "It remains to be seen whether the

Queen will acquire credit and influence in State affairs. I foresee evil should she do so, for she is extremely thoughtless and excessively *Austrian*. She is so volatile and so childish that she is incapable of adopting any settled plan of action." It is, however, absolutely certain that the particular friends of Marie Antionette, the members of that "Society" of which she was the unconscious tool, were perpetually urging her to take part in political affairs, unceasingly and eagerly assailing her attitude of careless indifference and forcing her, in spite of herself, to enter the political arena.

Tossed thus between opposing tides, the Queen, torn between her innate indolence and the entreaties of her friends, adopted a middle course and bethought herself of the plan so often followed by the fair sex (sometimes indeed by men as well), and took to politics or rather she interested herself in particular individuals, substituting her own preferences and sentiments for aims and ideals in the abstract.

Vermond had already predicted Marie Antoinette's speedy interference in public matters. "A time will come," he had observed, "in which she will be tired of her butterfly existence and then most probably her ambition will be awakened. Her spirit of independence will present an entirely different aspect from what it does at present. The desire to rule will appear, and it will then be most necessary for her to apply herself to gaining some knowledge without which it would be impossible to exercise authority."

A part of the Abbé's prediction, but only a part, was soon to be realized. When Marie Antoinette had on several occasions succeeded in vanquishing her adversaries and in promoting her friends, when she had, moreover, managed to overthrow a minister to replace him with a member of her own personal faction, she began to enjoy the exciting game and to feel a delighted exhilaration in manifesting her power

and influence, in making it clear to all that *she* ruled the man who was the Head of the State. But this rather empty pleasure satisfied her whole ambition. She never took the trouble to follow out any special line in politics; she never aspired to high ideals or sought to promote, irrespectively of individuals the welfare of the Kingdom and the Crown.

It is true, as will be apparent later on, that when disaster was imminent, when lightening flashes made visible the yawning gulfs before her feet, the Queen's latent energies were roused and that her inherited virtues at last made themselves evident, but that tragic moment is at present far distant. Marie Antoinette, now, is concerned only with her sovereign power in so far as it enables her to raise or cast down at will those about her, to gratify her personal sympathies or to manifest her dislikes; especially does she seek to satisfy her particular friends in every conceivable manner, hoping by so doing to earn their lively gratitude and to be spared any tiresome and fatiguing reproaches.

A fair amount of diplomacy was necessary in the beginning to acquire the desired ascendancy, for Louis XVI, by natural instinct and education as well, was averse from the interference of women in political matters. The example afforded by Louis XV and the deplorable results of the meddling of his various mistresses were not calculated to make the young monarch anxious for feminine guidance. "I was not specially told this" he had declared at his accession; "But I have read some history and I have observed that the wives and the favourites of the Sovereigns have always been the cause of the misfortunes of this nation." It followed that at first he resisted the Queen's whims pretty strongly, more especially where foreign politics were in question. But where home affairs were concerned Marie Antoin-

ette was unfortunately soon only too successful. Choiseul's advice had fallen on good ground; sometimes coaxing and persuasive, sometimes and more frequently violent and imperious, cleverly alternating angry reproaches with caresses, she very soon acquired complete control over her husband, who, dominated at first and finally fascinated by her, was foremost among the many who acclaimed Marie Antoinette's superior gifts of insight and judgment. "Que voulez vous?" he ejaculated good humouredly to Maurepas one day. "Her mind has such power over mine that I cannot possibly resist her."

The Queen's interference in politics may be said, without however entering into details, to have had very unfortunate results. She had been accustomed to look at circumstances and individuals from a purely personal standpoint, and when she began to take an interest in public matters, she persisted in this attitude, and a minister's position was at the mercy of a capricious fancy or a fit of temper. "She judges them," complained Vermond, "as does the public generally, which is ever dissatisfied. Moreover, as the flatterers of this Princess are almost invariably interested in discrediting the ministry, in criticising and making fun of each and all, it follows that she is never shewn the good points of any single being; only faults, real or imaginary, are incessantly pointed out to her."

An unlucky consequence of this state of affairs lay in the fact that some of the ministers who were aware of the Queen's frivolous tendencies sought to maintain their positions by giving way to all her fancies, however unreasonable, being convinced, according to Mercy, that "they will have nothing to fear from her, if they do just what she wants." By gratifying her and her especial friends they were enabled to administer the affairs of state much as they chose.

An extremely dangerous symptom was the ever-

increasing irritation of the lower classes. Never at any period in the history of France has "petticoat government" been viewed with favour; as the Comte de Provence has observed, "The most chivalrous nation in the world cannot bear the idea of being ruled by a woman." Since the regency of Anne of Austria and the troubles of the Fronde no woman's hand had openly taken the helm of government, but the whole nation was yet quivering with rage at the thought of the Pompadour's hidden influence, which, more than all the rest of the old King's faults and follies, had caused his name and memory to be unpopular. Soon, very soon, the French people will look on the Queen of France as though she were of the same order as the hated mistress of Louis XV and on her devoted head will descend the wrath which had for centuries been accumulating against an absolute monarchy. On July 15th 1789, when Louis XVI was leaving the National Assembly, a woman in mourning suddenly emerged from among the cheering throng and accosted Madame Campan, seizing her roughly by the arm and exclaiming: "I know you well; tell your Queen not to interfere with us any longer. Let her suffer her husband and our good States-General to govern the people!"

The chief obstacle to the Queen's ambition lay for long in the rival influence of the Prime Minister, Maurepas, the friend and adviser of the King whom Louis himself had singled out and whose character and good sense he admired and appreciated. The first seven years of the reign witnessed an ominous struggle, a hidden warfare, of which the echoes sometimes penetrated to the surface, between the seductive young Queen and the octogenarian Minister.

On the very day that Maurepas was installed in his important office Mercy had hastened to warn Marie Antoinette against the power in store for the

King's friend, whom he had nicknamed "The candidate of 'Mesdames Tantes.'" "I dare not," he declared, "hide from Your Majesty the disastrous results which I fear may result from his recall. The examples afforded by the preceding reigns proved that the influence of a Prime Minister in France has ever been directly opposed to the influence and repute of the Queen Consort."

Marie Antoinette had been duly impressed by these words, Maurepas's astuteness, his precautions, his concessions, all were in vain, confronted as they were by an instinctive repulsion which was carefully fostered by the Austrian Ambassador. The chronicles of the period are full of the struggles, the declared or hidden conflicts between the wily, subtle old man and the capricious Princess, two antagonists at death grips for supremacy, for complete power over the feeble, irresolute King, who always agreed with the last speaker. Sometimes there is indeed a sort of truce between the combatants and an attempt at an agreement is patched up between them, but it never lasts long and it is always directed against some third party, who has offended the Queen, or Maurepas, or both, and to overthrow whom they must combine forces. The object once obtained, they dislike each other as much as before and the struggle between them becomes more acute than ever.

After the fall and exile of d'Aiguillon, it was not until May 1776, when Turgot was dismissed from office, that Marie Antoinette openly entered the political arena. She had never cared for the great Controller-General, who, however was regarded by the nation as the one man likely to succeed in reforming abuses and in bringing about an era of justice, liberty and prosperity which would cause past miseries to be forgiven and forgotten. The Queen disliked Turgot personally; his sharp manner and puritanical outlook,

combined with his determined temper, alarmed and disquieted her, and an incident which had taken place at the very outset of his official career, was not calculated to make her regard him with affection.

Louis had promised the new Controller-General that orders for cash payment should not in future be paid out; a very few days later an order for 500,000 livres was presented at the Royal Treasury in favour of "A lady of the Court" (really the Queen herself) and signed by the King. Turgot immediately repaired to Louis XVI, who stammered out that he had been "taken by surprise." "What am I to do?" asked Turgot. "Don't pay." Tears, indignation on the part of Marie Antoinette. Finally a compromise was agreed upon, but the Queen did not forget the incident. A year later, another dispute occurred on the occasion of the nomination of a new Superintendent of the Poste, a very lucrative appointment, which the Queen coveted on behalf of the Chevalier de Montmorency and which Turgot abolished altogether on economical grounds to the unbounded indignation of Marie Antoinette, who henceforth ignored the Controller-general altogether.

About the same time Turgot set the whole Polignac clique against him because he opposed the awarding of a pension to Madame d'Andlau, Madame de Polignac's aunt, which Louis XVI had been induced to grant. As soon as the pension had been obtained, Madame de Polignac, possibly out of bravado, wrote to the controller to thank him for his kindness. Turgot declined to accept this undeserved gratitude: "Madame," he replied drily, "you owe me no thanks because I did all that I could and ought, to oppose what was proposed." Accordingly a very impertinent letter was compiled by the members of the clique in the presence of the Queen, and before it was dispatched to Turgot it was shown to Maurepas.

"Madame," said the Mentor to Madame de Polignac, "if ever you have reason to be displeased with me, give me a box on the ear, but spare me such a letter!"

After a few other similar incidents, matters were ripe for a complete rupture, but a strong coalition was needed, and at this juncture the Baron de Besenval once more appears upon the scene. He and Madame de Polignac agreed that nothing could be done without Maurepas, so the Duchess undertook to manage the Queen, and the Baron turned his attention to the Minister. They were both highly successful, and the arguments used by Besenval to convince Maurepas may be given as a specimen of their tactics. "I desire," declared the Baron, "to become your friend and to contrive that you should see more of the Queen. It should be easier for you to gain her friendship than for almost anyone, for you are witty and agreeable; you will be able to amuse her and to instruct her as well." Maurepas soon saw what was required of him, and his slumbering jealousy of Turgot made him a willing accomplice in the plot. The Queen, too, was easily managed. Madame de Polignac, who hitherto had been inimical to Maurepas, now suddenly veered round and lauded him to the skies, impressing upon Her Majesty the extreme desirability of a reconciliation with the clever statesman; moreover, declared the Duchess, it would be so easily accomplished, a matter merely of a few civil words. Marie Antoinette was very soon convinced of the wisdom of her friend's advice, and an interview was accordingly arranged between the Queen and the Mentor. All passed off admirably; Maurepas professed his devotion; Marie Antoinette declared that she had full confidence in him; they were almost affectionate and during the touching scene, the King, who had been told of what was going on, suddenly entered the apartment. "Sire," exclaimed Maurepas, "you behold

before you the happiest of men, one who is overpowered by the goodness of the Queen and who henceforth will only live to show his gratitude and prove his zeal!" Marie Antoinette, for her part, declared that she now knew that she had been wrong in her sentiments regarding M. de Maurepas and that she was "perfectly satisfied with him." The King was so delighted that he "ran to his wife to embrace her, holding M. de Maurepas's hand the while. The Queen rose from her couch to receive the King, and in the general excitement a part of her lofty headdress fell off. M. de Maurepas picked it up and kissed the King's hand as he did so—in fact they all laughed and wept together." (*Memoirs of the Abbé de Véri.*)

Veiled by these effusions, the conspiracy against the great reformer had now found its leader, though no member of the Polignac faction openly declared what each privately intended — the overthrow of Turgot.

It was necessary to find a suitable occasion on which to set a match to the fuel, and the affair of the Comte de Guines furnished the spark to produce the required explosion. This friend of the Queen, who was Ambassador in London, was perhaps the most pernicious and the most generally disliked personality in the whole of the Polignac clique. He had recently been summarily recalled on account of his indiscreet dealings with the Spanish Ambassador, dealings which might possibly—France being on the eve of war with Great Britain—tend to compromise both the "Family treaty" and the Spanish Alliance. Vergennes had advised de Guines' recall and Turgot had warmly seconded it. For the moment the Comte's most intimate friends, and Choiseul in particular, did not dare defend his cause, so greatly had he been to blame. But this interval of sanity was short-lived. The Polignac clique could not suffer one of its members

to be attacked without rising *en masse* to protect him. A sort of secret plot was formed to rescue this so-called "victim" of Vergennes and Turgot, in which the Queen took part with passionate vehemence, so uncompromising indeed was her attitude that Mercy sorrowfully wrote to the Empress, "Her Majesty seems to be possessed; they have contrived to rouse her pride, to irritate her, and to blacken the characters of those who, for the general good dare to resist her wishes."

Of course, the real aim of the plotters was not to replace the unskilful Ambassador but to weaken the Cabinet and overthrow the man whose determined temper refused to bend to the whims of the clique, and so Vergennes boldly informed the King, who, worried and confused, lost his head completely and did not know where to turn or in whom to confide. At this critical moment de Guines suddenly arrived in Paris and all his energies and those of his friends were at once concentrated in the effort to overthrow Turgot, to whom however, no hint was given as to what was going on. The Queen, tutored by Maurepas, seemed oblivious of the whole disturbance and in public she never addressed a word to the recalled Ambassador. But the plot was all the while secretly maturing and according to Dupont de Lemours, its members did not scruple to employ criminal methods. They dared to forge Turgot's handwriting, and false letters, purporting to be written by him and containing impertinent references to both the King and Queen were freely circulated. It was said that the Sieur d'Ogny, Superintendent of the Royal posts planned the affair.

The Queen, quite deceived, boiled with fury. From henceforth she never gave her Consort a moment's peace, she was either in floods of tears or passionately angry, and completely lost control of herself. A ducal

title for de Guines did not suffice, she declared that Turgot must go at once, she even suggested that the Controller-General should be sent to the Bastille, and "the strongest and most earnest entreaties were needed to make her give up such an absurd idea." (Mercy Argenteau.) The unhappy King, confronted by such furious indignation, felt that he was behaving with a fair amount of firmness when he decided to grant—not the whole—but the greater part of his wife's demands; he therefore promised that Turgot should be dismissed and also that he would send an autographed letter to de Guines, conferring the ducal title. This letter was written under the jealous eye of the Queen and it had to be rewritten three times before she found it "sufficiently kindly." The rough draft of this missive is still in existence and testifies to a complete capitulation, a humiliating disavowal of the just measure of recall signed a few weeks earlier. "The King has manifestly contradicted himself and has compromised himself in the eyes of the public, which is well aware that all this is the result of the Queen's interference and what might almost be called her terrorising of the King," was the melancholy reflection of Mercy Argenteau. The very next morning the iniquitous sentence was carried out and Turgot, who had twice vainly attempted to have a personal interview with Louis, was informed instead by Bertin that the King's commands were that he must resign his portfolio and leave Versailles without again showing himself at Court; Malesherbes, his faithful friend and adviser, shared his fate. The Queen's friends were triumphant, they even manifested their joy aloud in the galleries and halls of Versailles, the Comte d'Artois being specially demonstrative. To Marie Antoinette's credit be it observed that she refrained from openly expressing her pleasure, nay, in writing to the Empress, she disavowed any share in the matter;

"I declare to my dear Mama," she says, "that, although I cannot say that I regret the departure of the two, I had nothing to do with it." Maria Theresa's reply (she had been kept well informed) diplomatic as it is, nevertheless points a moral: "I am truly glad to know that you have had no share in the dismissal of the two Ministers in whom the public trusted. You say that you do not regret their departure and I suppose that you have your own reasons, but the general public has for some time seemed less satisfied with you and all manner of little intrigues—highly unbecoming in your position—are connected with your name."

The Empress was justified in her remarks, for the dismissal of Turog was Marie Antoinette's first great political blunder. Although on various future occasions she was more openly implicated and thus incurred more public censure, no other error on her part was more injurious to the nation, nor, should, viewed from the historical standpoint, reflect more discredit upon her memory.

Quite otherwise, be it observed, was Marie Antoinette's behaviour regarding Necker, the second and also the last of those courageous reformers who so heroically attempted to prop up the doomed Monarchy, or at least to shed some ray of light upon the dark abyss into which it was so rapidly descending. This alteration in the Queen's attitude is caused not so much by any change in her opinions, as by the difference in the men themselves. Necker was not such a deep thinker as Turgot but he was a better politician. He was not, to quote his daughter, "one of those arbitary beings, who consider that all is lost if some slight concession to human nature is found to be necessary, or who, on perceiving a little hillock, immediately proceed to doubt whether the earth be in reality round." The new Controller-General understood better than

his predecessor had done how to handle men and affairs, and consequently he was more successful in his dealings with the Queen. We find in Mercy's despatches constant references to Necker's adaptability: "He is respectful, submissive, even, to the Queen's wishes, chivalrously prompt in waiting on her whenever she may express a wish for his presence, most careful not to offend by an abrupt refusal of any request she may chance to make. On the contrary he patiently discusses with her and quietly argues out any matter in question, showing its probable advantages or disadvantages. He contrives always to defer to the desires, nay even to the caprices, of Marie Antoinette and by giving in in small matters he usually manages to gain his point in those that really signify."

His tactics were highly successful and, as Mercy remarks: "Of all the King's Ministers M. Necker is the one whom the Queen prefers and to whose opinion she defers." Her approval is not confined to mere speeches. When Necker undertakes (after having made sweeping reductions in the King's establishment) to reform the Queen's household, she, despite her natural love of luxury, consents with a good grace to the various sacrifices she is called upon to make. She even goes so far as to praise the Controller-General's courage in attacking the question of Finance, and when the proposed reforms have been carried out, she says one day to Mercy: "As you occasionally visit the Neckers and as I highly appreciate M. Necker's talents, I want you to inform him of my feelings towards him and I desire that he should know that I always read the accounts of his financial operations with the greatest pleasure." She is adamant against all the covert insinuations of the members of the Polignac faction, who had at first approved of Necker but who had very soon turned against him. Ten years later after his final retirement from public

affairs, Necker, in a private letter not meant for publication, warmly refers to Marie Antoinette's unvarying kindness, to her constant support, to her encouragement of all his efforts in the cause of reform.

On the day on which the Controller-General, after five years of power, knowing himself to be secretly defamed by Maurepas, vanquished by Parliament, calumniated by the Princes of the Blood, disliked by practically the whole of the upper classes and but feebly protected by Louis XVI himself, on the day on which he despairingly decided to retire from office, unless the King could be prevailed upon to publicly show his support and approval, Necker, as a last resource, turned to the Queen, in the hope that she might be induced to plead his cause and rouse her Consort to some appearance of energy. He asked for, and obtained, an audience, which lasted for more than an hour and which was marked by deep emotion. The Minister expatiated on the many obstacles in his path, on the plots, of which he was the object, and confessed his deep, heartfelt discouragement. He ended by declaring that he had made up his mind that his retirement, in the face of such over-powering difficulties, was necessary and he handed to the Queen a letter, which contained his resignation.

His words, his manner touched Marie Antoinette to the heart. She well understood that Necker's retirement meant the loss of a friend to her and she also dimly realised that the King would lose a faithful servant. She tried to dissuade him from his intention, she even wept, but the day was drawing to a close and the Minister did not perceive her tears, he was told of them next day by a friend and declared with much feeling that had he been aware of them at the time he must unhesitatingly have sacrificed his reputation and his happiness. But Marie Antoinette's sympathy ended with her tears. She took

no active part in the matter. She did not offer to seek the King or to use her power over him in order to make him take up a firm stand. She merely assured Necker that his letter should be sent to Louis, which it accordingly was.

Could she have done more? Could she, single-handed, have triumphed over so many adversaries? Supposing that she had, in order to save Necker, shown the same tenacity, employed the same methods and entreaties that she had formerly employed to get rid of Turgot, would she have carried her point? Mercy seems to think that she would have succeeded in doing so and very likely he is right. But Mercy also knew very well that Marie Antoinette was incapable of enduring energetic effort where serious matters were in question, ready as she was to exert herself when her own whims and caprices were involved. Accordingly, Louis accepted the Minister's resignation; Necker was informed of his fate that same evening; and departed the next morning. The Queen, so it was said, wept bitterly for the whole afternoon. It is only just to record the tears and grief of Marie Antoinette. She was almost the only being at Court to realise what the loss of Necker would probably mean to France and her venerable Monarchy.

The Queen's emotion was doubtless sincere enough, nevertheless, her heart was not wholly in the matter, for during the first period of the reign, Marie Antoinette's real concern lay, neither in the interior administration of the State, or even, to the great dismay of the House of Hapsburg, in its conduct of foreign affairs; what really and truly interested her in the many-spoked wheel of the State-machine was the Ministry of War. The reason for this interest is at once apparent, for is it not in the army that opportunities will offer themselves of distributing graces and favours, of satisfying the insatiable demands of her entourage? The

mere mention of the many and varying degrees of rank, the numerous garrisons and the fact that promotion was by interest alone, suffice to show what an inexhaustible mine was afforded by the Army to the ambitions and the covetous desires of those who were about the Queen. Her interference in military matters is, therefore only too evident. To please her friends she took an active interest in army promotion and in the distribution of the forces no war minister was free from her demands—her orders, even. It was said that for more than fifteen years, no one had received a command of a regiment without the Queen's knowledge or permission. But, with her habitual carelessness, she not seldom promised the same colonelcy to several different persons. "She would," remarks the Comtesse de Boigne, "promise one and the same appointment to ten different families, thus nine were disgusted and the tenth was very often quite unworthy." St. Priest in his memoirs, declares: "She meddled with all the nominations and it is easy to imagine how small was the number of grateful recipients, how large the number of the ungrateful and how numerous the openly discontented individuals. Nothing that transpired during her career earned her more hatred."

Constant strife was the natural result of this perpetual meddling. The chronicles of the reign are full of the quarrels of the Queen with successive Ministers, who, invariably, at some period in their career, excited her wrath by either being tardy in executing her demands or by refusing them altogether. The unlucky Comte de St. Germain, a rigid administrator, but a timid courtier, had an especially hard time. He was so worn out with the reproaches and complaints which were showered upon him that he finally fled to the King and complained of the injustice with which he was treated. Louis received him most kindly and allowed that his complaints were fully justified; "But,"

concluded His Majesty shamefacedly, "we must not upset the Queen, so contrive somehow or other to satisfy her."

One little scene, among many, which is told with gusto by Esterhazy in his amusing memoirs, clearly portrays the difficulties encountered by the unfortunate Minister. Esterhazy, a great friend of Marie Antoinette is disgusted to find that his particular regiment has been ordered to Montmédy, which he considered "the most disagreeable garrison in France." He consequently at once repairs to the Queen and complains bitterly of St. Germain. "Never mind," says Marie Antoinette, "just wait and hear what I will say to him!" She conceals the officer in a small room opening off her apartment and sends for St. Germain, to whom, as soon as he appears, she remarks: "Well Sir, my being interested in anyone apparently provides a good reason for your annoying him! Why are you sending Esterhazy to Montmédy—that most detestable garrison?" "But, Madame," tremblingly replies the unhappy Minister: "It was arranged long ago. One cannot move an old regiment to put in a new one!" "That is your affair, but M. Esterhazy must have what he wants and you must come and tell me so!" Upon which the narrator continues: "She turned her back on him and came to me in the little room from which I had heard everything." The very next day St. Germain despatched a young officer to Esterhazy with a list of the vacant garrisons from which to make his choice.

Proceedings such as the above, which were of constant occurrence, had, as was natural, the worst possible effect on army discipline as a whole and, moreover, they destroyed the authority of the Minister who had been zealous in the cause of reform. By her frequent opposition, as well as by her perpetual, pitiless censure, the Queen was in great measure

responsible for the regrettable failure and speedy fall from power of the man who had been described as "The Military Turgot."

St. Germain was succeeded by the Prince de Montbarey, one of Maurepas' creatures, and Marie Antoinette had no hand in his promotion. She soon disliked him even more than she had disliked his predecessor, but in his case she had good cause for complaint. Montbarey was frequently guilty of offences which were highly reprehensible in a man who was holding a most important public appointment. Mademoiselle Renard of the Opera was openly his mistress, and she, eager for the fray, meddled in all the various sections of the War Department, and distributed, for cash down, commissions, decorations, and degrees in rank. On more than one occasion the Queen, canvassing for a protégé, found the coveted post already accorded to Mdlle Renard's nominee. Her indignation may be imagined. There were furious scenes between her and the Minister, in which, exasperated Majesty frequently lost its temper altogether—indeed, on one occasion Marie Antoinette rushed furiously out of the apartment, slamming the door so violently that the lock was broken.

After three years of these amenities, Maurepas, influenced by them as well as by the disapproval of the general public, began to perceive that he had better turn the cold shoulder to his friend. He therefore quietly looked about for a substitute and he finally fixed on the Comte de Puységur, a much-respected officer whom he had known for long and on whose fidelity he felt that he could rely with complete confidence. Meanwhile the Queen's party was also on the alert, and after many discussions all the members of the clique agreed to nominate as their candidate, General the Marquis de Ségur, Governor of the provinces of Burgundy and Franche Comté, the friend

of Choiseul, of Necker and of Madame de Polignac. Marie Antoinette was accordingly given her cue by the Duchess and was soon quite willing to promote M. de Ségur's cause, it was, therefore, only necessary to fix on the propitious moment for entering the lists and engaging in the fray.

A stupid mistake very nearly spoilt the whole thing. The Queen, as soon as she had decided upon favouring Ségur, thought it would be a good move to "sound" the King; accordingly in a long interview with Louis, she inveighed against Montbarey and declared that public opinion necessitated his immediate dismissal, then she proceeded to introduce the subject of Ségur, whom she praised to the skies. Louis, as was most natural, reported the whole conversation to Maurepas, who, completely taken by surprise, very wisely said neither "yes" nor "no"; however, he privately resolved to fight against the Queen's nominee with every possible and procurable means. Fortune favoured him. The Marquis de Ségur arrived at Versailles to pay court to the Queen. He was just recovering from a severe attack of gout and he presented a melancholy appearance, being ghastly pale, and walking with difficulty by the aid of a stick; he had, moreover, but one arm, the other having been lost in battle. Maurepas at once declared to the King that it was an absurd idea to offer a most weighty and fatiguing position to a man in such a state of health and he took the opportunity of commenting upon the indiscreet ambition of the Duchesse de Polignac who, he declared, for her own personal ends, was in the habit of taking advantage of the Queen's good nature, causing Her Majesty to make grave mistakes; he therefore begged to nominate his own candidate, the Comte de Puységur. Louis was exceedingly vexed at the whole affair, he at once repaired to his wife and expressed his feelings plainly, for once, complain-

ing alike of her behaviour and that of her friends. "As for Ségur," he declared, "it is ridiculous to think of him; he is very gouty and incapable of active work."

The Queen, greatly annoyed in her turn, vented her displeasure upon Madame de Polignac who, to begin with, received her reproaches with respectful silence, finally, however, she lost patience and declared that if Her Majesty really thought so badly of her, she could no longer remain about the Royal person and she would prefer to retire from Court. Amazed and frightened, the Queen at once tried to retract all she had said; but the Duchess was inexorable and respectfully and coldly repeated that she would prefer to go. Marie Antoinette's apologies and entreaties availed nothing against her friend's impassive determination, which was more alarming by far, than anger would have been. The mere thought of losing anyone who was so necessary to her happiness put Marie Antoinette into a state of actual despair. She cast her pride to the winds, and bursting into tears she embraced the knees of the Duchess, assuring her over and over again of her love and devotion. Madame de Polignac could not resist such real grief. She was herself in tears as she raised Marie Antoinette and clasped her in a fond embrace. The friends had a long, tender confidential talk at the close of which all was well once more, in fact, they loved each other more than ever and to seal the compact of their friendship the Queen undertook more decidedly than before to get rid of Montbarey and get Ségur appointed in his place. Such was the unforeseen end of Maurepas's little plot.

Henceforth the Prince de Montbarey led but a precarious existence. His approaching fall and his problematical successor were the current topics of conversation. One evening, at Marly, in the Queen's reception room a round game called "Fear," in which

each player " lived and died " in turn, was in progress. Montbarey was one of the players and as soon as he had taken his place, the cries of " fear " and " death " were so insistent, the glances of the company so expressive, that he was quite upset and left the room; he saw that his cause was lost. The Queen's open dislike, the coldness of the King and the feeble partisanship of Maurepas, all these circumstances were more than sufficient to open his eyes to his position. He decided not to await certain dismissal but to depart of his own free will; accordingly on the 17th of December 1780 he suddenly resigned his portfolio, left his official residence and departed to his own house, leaving the Court and the King's Privy Council amazed at his precipitate flight.

The next few days were full of feverish excitement, of plotting and of counter-plotting. The Queen, Necker, and the Polignac clique were determined that Ségur and none other should be appointed, but they had to reckon with Maurepas, who was equally determined that his candidate, Puységur, should be the fortunate man. The King was besieged by the two conflicting parties, and perplexed and worried, he as usual, said nothing at all. On Christmas Eve the Court being assembled in His Majesty's apartments; the Queen drew Madame de Polignac aside for a moment and whispered that the game was up, that Maurepas had won and had coerced the King into promising to make Puységur Minister of War. The Duchess said nothing at the time, but late the same night she came to the Queen, and the two friends held a long confidential confabulation. The Duchess, in vigorous language, depicted the Court on tenterhooks, the general public, outsiders even, each and all following with lively interest the tussle for power between the Queen Consort and Maurepas; she dilated upon the " slap in the face " to Marie Antoin-

ette, should she be worsted and fail to place her nominee. The Queen's pride was touched, and over-excited, eager for the fray, she promised, before her friend left her, to strain every nerve in one last great effort.

Accordingly, by seven o'clock on Christmas Day she was with the King and Maurepas had been summoned. He presently appeared in breathless haste. Hardly had he entered the apartment, when the Queen addressed him in a conciliatory manner, explaining the whole state of affairs and praising Ségur, declaring, moreover, that she only had the welfare of the nation at heart. Then, suddenly changing her tone, she asked Maurepas what were his reasons for opposing Ségur's nomination. Maurepas, all unprepared as he was, confusedly indicated a few somewhat feeble reasons for his objections and ended by a kindly word or two for the Queen's nominee, upon which Louis broke in, observing: "Come, Monsieur, pretend that you are in my place and decide one way or the other!" "I should not venture to decide before the present company," replied the old Minister, becoming more and more ill at ease; "but my opinion remains unaltered." "And I honour you for that," exclaimed Marie Antoinette; "it would be very wrong to change your opinion on my account, but you must perceive that I, also, cannot alter *my* opinion!" At this juncture Louis was heard to stammer a few words which might or might not be interpolated in favour of Ségur. The Queen saw her chance, and feigning to discern a direct injunction in the King's meaningless phrases, she at once assumed an air of Imperial command and turning to Maurepas: "Monsieur, you have heard what is the King's command," she declared. "Send at once for M. de Ségur." There was nothing more to be said or done—the old man bowed deeply and retired. As he passed the King, Louis stopped him, seized his hand

and wrung it, whispering; "Don't forsake me altogether!"

The King narrowly escaped the sorrow which the desertion of such an old and faithful friend would have been to him; for Maurepas, in his humiliation and vexation, realising as he did but too well the gravity of the blow he had received, considered seriously for more than a week the desirability of retiring from office. However, he could not resist the King's entreaties, and he remained Prime Minister. Henceforth, however, he was not much more than a figurehead for the Queen had become all-powerful. "She and her Society settle everything," affirmed the Duc de Croy, and Mercy writes that: "the Queen has such influence over the King that she could have her own way in all State affairs if she so desired." At the death of Maurepas, which took place a year later, in November 1781, she had, according to the Abbé Georgel, "almost attained to supreme power," and Mercy dilates on her "extraordinary influence" and her "being able to govern the Kingdom should she wish to do so." Eight months later, however, he is lamenting that she makes so little use of the power she has secured, that she does not apply herself to business but merely distributes her favours and thinks she is playing a great part when she has secured promotion for her various friends. It is the old story. The Queen does not really rule. She only *seems* to be doing so. Others, using her name, are active, are intriguing, are insisting on their plans and wishes being carried out, which in public estimation seem to be the plans and wishes of the Queen. Her friends are the real rulers, but all responsibility for their mistakes fall on her.

The nomination of Calonne offered a most striking example of the truth of this fact. Necker's immediate successors—Joly de Fleury and after him d'Ormesseau

—had been merely, as it were, birds of passage in the Controller-Generalship. In October 1783 the important post was once more vacant, a prize for the ambitious. One of the most striking frequenters of the Polignac salon was Charles Alexandre de Calonne the Intendant of Lille of whom the Duc de Lévis has drawn this charming portrait: " I have ever found him easy and brilliant, full of grace and good taste, amiable in every sense of the word, without spite or ill-humour, and able to impartially discuss his numerous enemies. His face was handsome and his figure elegant, his civility unfailing. He was never haughty or consequential and he is the only man in office I have ever known who did not possess that sort of unctuous formality which is all very well on public occasions but which is more than odious in general society. He had very charming manners and no one understood better how to decorate a reception-room or adorn a festival. . . . I perceive on glancing over what I have written that I have described a very charming man of the world, such then, is the opinion of a real statesman," Madame de Boigne completes the Duc de Lévis' portrait of Calonne as follows: " It would have been impossible to find a more charming, a more volatile, a more undependable youth. Though he was extraordinarily brilliant and clever he was never out of mischief and made the most stupid mistakes."

It may be said as well that he was careless, presumptuous, a spendthrift, that he loathed accounts and " detestable sums," that he was head over heels in debt, though he only laughed at his embarrassments. It was actually this delightful butterfly of a courtier whom the Polignac clique, at the instigation of Vergennes who was extremely fond of Calonne, decided to nominate as Controller-General, expecting that he would pull the nation through a most formidable crisis and conjure away the impending financial ruin.

The Queen was not fond of Calonne and estimated him at his true worth. For some time she resisted the suggestions and entreaties of her entourage and steadily refused to back him. But Vandreuil grew angry; Madame de Polignac, pushed on by Bretenil, pleaded hard for her nominee, and the Comte d'Artois, who was taken in by Calonne's loquacity and fair promises, lauded him to the skies; so at last Marie Antoinette gave in and consented to mention the matter to the King. Accordingly, on November 1st 1783 she and Louis held a long serious discussion as to the practicability of Calonne's nomination. It was, however, common gossip that the affair was finally decided by the intervention of Vergennes, who in his turn was exploited by the Court banker d'Herblay, whose wife was openly Calonne's mistress. After such fashion did the choice fall on that fatal man, who in four short years completed the ruin of French finance and sealed the doom of the Monarchy.

Marie Antoinette's share in this disastrous mistake has been indicated. She had not sought out Calonne, indeed she had opposed his election, but all the same the public held her to blame and it must be allowed that at the beginning of Calonne's administration, she afforded grounds for the general opinion that she had been favourable to him. He was so charming, he disposed of difficulties so easily, so gracefully, he treated the gravest subjects with such airy ease that the Queen was taken in by him. All Paris knew and quoted Calonne's reply to some request of Marie Antoinette's. "Madame if it is possible it is done; if it is impossible it shall be done." As it happens the famous reply was made to the Queen by Monsieur de Beaujou, one of Calonne's followers, but this is immaterial—the words portray precisely the relations which existed between the Queen and the Controller-General. To any whim of hers, to any desire that she

might express, he never by any chance raised any objection; he did not even venture on the least criticism or even on an appeal to her good sense. Instead, Calonne always contrived to find money in the coffers of the State, indeed the public funds seemed to increase a hundredfold in his hands. One day in her presence someone happened to mention Necker's talents with enthusiasm. "Yes," said the Queen; "*he* was a wizard, but this man works miracles!"

The immediate consequence of this belief is that extravagance, which has for a time been in abeyance, is soon more rampant than ever before. In two years, during Calonne's administration, the expenses of the wardrobe has increased by 53,000 pounds; from 25,000 livres dressmakers' bills amount to 100,000 livres or more. For a costume to be worn once only, at a New Year Fête, the famous Mademoiselle Bertin charges the Queen 6000 livres, and for the making alone, be it noted: materials are not included! All seems so easy, so delightful; long afterwards Marie Antoinette, when discussing those happy far-off days, said innocently: "How could I possibly know that money-matters were in such a bad way? If I asked for £50,000 £100,000 was immediately offered me."

The state of enchantment, however, was not destined to be prolonged for ever, and the Queen was one of the first to be disillusioned as to Calonne's capabilities. She became aware of the state of affairs before her husband's eyes were opened, for Louis had been completely won over by Calonne's charming manner and was in the habit of referring affectionately to him as "My dear Controller-General." Marie Antoinette's disapproval of the Minister was first openly shown at the Assembly of the Notables in February 1787. At the very first sitting of the Assembly the yawning gulf appeared and a debt of a hundred and fifteen million livres had to be confessed: the astound-

ing intelligence caused a burst of public indignation. The Queen determined to learn the whole extent of the disaster and she summoned to her presence several of the chief notables. After questioning them on all points, she decided to advise Calonne's dismissal. Intense indignation at her decision was shown by the members of the clique; Madame de Polignac, egged on by Vandreuil, declined to give up the Controller-General and defended him vigorously and the Comte d'Artois backed her up energetically. There were stormy scenes between the Queen and her friend, and many bitter words were exchanged; indeed, for long there existed a coldness between the two.

This time, however, the Queen stood firm and she gained her point. But an evil fate decreed that, though she had succeeded in getting rid of a dangerous man, she should put a still more dangerous one in his place. And this time the Polignac faction had no say in the matter, but the two fatherly counsellors, the two spiritual directors of Marie Antoinette, the Abbé de Vermond and Mercy-Argenteau, led her on to disaster, as though some special evil influence decreed that all whom she loved and trusted should have a hand in her undoing.

Between Vermond and Loménie de Brienne, Archbishop of Toulouse, there existed an old and intimate alliance. It was Loménie, who, as has been already told, suggested Vermond to Choiseul as tutor and confessor to the future Dauphine. Vermond had always been excessively grateful, and he was eager to show his gratitude. Mercy, persuaded and talked over by the Abbé, had a great admiration for the Archbishop and lost no opportunity of praising his manifold talents to Marie Antoinette and exciting her on to use all her influence in his favour. At every change of ministry he put forward his name and he had already, through the Queen's influence, obtained for him the

Blue Ribbon of the Order of the Holy Ghost, and in his letters to the Court of Vienna his desire to cultivate the prelate in view of his future elevation and to make of him the obliged and humble servant of Marie Antoinette is very apparent.

But the King had also to be reckoned with, and Louis heartily disliked Loménie. The Archbishop of Toulouse, who was so wily, so distinguished in manner, so subservient to people of consequence, so chivalrous to women, in fine a perfect actor, was to the King anathema, for he led a dissipated life and worse still he was reputed to be an atheist. At the death of M. de Beaumont he had been suggested as a suitable successor in the Archbishopric of Paris. "I think," said Louis, disgustedly, "that the Archbishop of Paris ought at least to believe in God!" It is hardly necessary to state that Loménie was in great favour with all the "Encyclopédistes" and especially with d'Alembert, who had made him a member of the Academy. All these various circumstances were remembered and commented upon when the Controller-Generalship was rendered vacant by the dismissal of Calonne.

The state of affairs was really terrible in April 1787; the spectre of bankruptcy hovered over the land and the general suspense was heartrending. Every day, writes Mercy, the King came to talk over matters with his wife, and he was frequently in tears. He counted on her to guide him along the dark, treacherous path before him. Vergennes, the only minister in whom he had felt any confidence since the death of Maurepas, had just died, and with him went the last, the very last obstacle to the Queen's complete supremacy. Still, however, though she well knew the extent of her power over Louis, Marie Antoinette did not dare at once to propose to him the name of the detested Archbishop. With feminine tact she first mentioned Necker, knowing that the King thoroughly disliked him; then, as

though on second thoughts, she just indicated Loménie de Brienne. Louis almost leapt from his seat: "*Ni Neckraille ni prêtraille!*" he shouted rudely, but after a little he calmed down and began to discuss the matter. The recall of Necker would seem to him, he said, to be a sort of abdication on his part, and if the "Genevois" returned he might as well occupy the throne altogether, but then on the other hand he confessed to the most intense aversion to the Archbishop.

At this point the Queen threw aside all pretence and spoke warmly on behalf of her nominee, the only man who would, she declared, be capable of rescuing the kingdom from financial ruin and disgrace. She was utterly wrong in her opinion as it turned out, but at the time she was by no means alone in her belief, for Loménie's opposition to Calonne's proposals both before and during the Assembly of the Notables had caused a good many of the public to regard him with favour. Breteuil, Montmorin, Lamoignon were all consulted on the subject, and they all three more or less strongly supported the Queen. The King, accordingly, was over-persuaded and Vermond enjoyed his hour of triumph. "Seventeen years of patience," he declared, "have not been too long to arrive at last at such a splendid result!"

The Queen also, was exultant. She really was now the "Disposer of the Kingdom." "She rules," wrote Mercy-Argenteau, and Loménie unscrupulously profited by the Queen's omnipotence. He was not content with the title of Controller-General, but very soon caused himself to be made Prime Minister and head of the Council of Finance, and when the Ministers of War and of Marine, the Marshalls de Ségur and de Castries retired after seven years in office, the Comte de Loménie, brother of the Prelate, was made Commander-in-chief of the Army. For a period of

fifteen months the Archbishop was practically Dictator. Marie Antoinette was Queen, but Loménie governed, and Mercy Argenteau was besotted enough to rejoice at all this. He wrote to Vienna that "the Archbishop well knows that it is to the Queen alone that he owes all and that therefore her prestige is daily increasing." Loménie naturally made the most of the Queen's attitude towards him. He invited her to all councils and allowed her to think that she had the casting vote in all decisions. As she was almost always merely his obedient echo he had no trouble in arranging State affairs according to his own plans and wishes. The results of this partnership are alas! but too well known. Merely to see the new Minister at work was to be speedily convinced that intrigue and real politics are two very different things. "Ten days," declares the Duc de Lévis, "were more than enough to demonstrate his utter incapability," and Mercy, at lengh aware of the true state of affairs, wrote as follows to the Emperor Joseph: "The Archbishop is so far not a success. He is up to his neck in details and does not seem capable of perceiving matters as a whole, however he is most attentive to the Queen and she will be able to do as she pleases with him." Bankers and capitalists took advantage of the new Minister's ignorance of affairs to cheat and to refuse their co-operation. Parliament was in open revolt and the struggles of the early years of the preceding reign were renewed between the Throne and the Magistracy. Confusion, disorder and disorganisation were rampant in all the various State departments.

The Queen was held responsible for the whole miserable business. In vain did she willingly make the sacrifices demanded of her. Huge economies were effected in her household; 1,200,000 francs yearly were gained by suppressing certain perquisites which, as a contemporary writer puts it, her "voracious hangers-on"

were accustomed to pocket and whose violent protests against this necessary measure were loud and long. Public opinon gave her no credit for her somewhat tardy repentance and readiness to retrench. She was regarded merely as the avowed patroness of the most unpopular, the most detested of Ministers, and the general disaffection and discontent were terribly apparent. At the Salon they did not even dare to hang her portrait, for fear that it might be insulted by the mob. A caricature was circulated which represents the royal pair at dinner—Louis is holding a glass, his Consort has a fork in her hand and round the table presses an open-mouthed, gaping crowd—underneath are inscribed the following words: "The King drinks, the Queen eats, and the people protest."

In August 1788, when it was decided to suspend payment of a portion of Government stock, popular fury rose to such heights that the situation became acute. The mob howled at what was in reality bankruptcy disguised, and from hour to hour, from minute to minute, people sat in trembling fear, expecting riots and revolution. Mercy declared that the Archbishop "has no money and no resources and that he has become an object of detestation to the whole nation." On the 19th of the month the Ambassador repaired to Marie Antoinette and found her in tears and grief, and aware that even if Loménie is not to be at once dismissed, Necker must be implored to return, to assist the Archbishop with his wise counsels and experience. The Queen entreated Mercy to negotiate this extremely delicate matter and Mercy, without declining point-blank to be a go-between, pointed out to her the obvious objections to this curious combination and the extreme unlikelihood of his (Mercy) having any chance of succeeding in manipulating the affair. He retired and the very same evening he received the following distracted letter from the Queen:

"I much fear that the Archbishop will have to go altogether, and then who is available to put at the head of everything? Someone must be found, especially if M. Necker returns. He always requires a curb. The Personage above me (the King) is fit for nothing. As for me, whatever happens, I am but second in command, and although the first in command has confidence in me, he often makes me feel this." It is curious to reflect that no one seemed to perceive how extraordinary it was that the Ambassador of a foreign power should be the recipient of such intimate confidences.

As a matter of fact, the singular combination planned by Marie Antoinette was never, indeed never could possibly have been attempted. For nearly a week the Queen struggled on, exhausting herself by stupendous efforts, which met with no success. At last she gave in and bowed to the inevitable. Loménie must go and Necker, singlehanded, return to power. Marie Antoinette's grief and humiliation were bitter and profound. "The Archbishop has gone," she writes to Mercy on August the 25th. "I cannot tell you how deeply the events of this day have distressed me. I think it was necessary to take up this plan of action, but at the same time it may bring many misfortunes. I have just written a few lines to M. Necker asking him to come to me to-morrow at ten o'clock. There must be no more putting-off. If he can begin business to-morrow so much the better, for it is very urgent. I am shaking all over, forgive me for being so stupid, at the thought that it is I who am bringing him back. My fate seems to be to bring misfortune and if infernal plots cause him to fail once more, or if he interferes with the King's authority, I shall be hated more than I am already!"

These last lines almost seem to be prophetic, but, alas! what a strange, what a melancholy truth it is that

Marie Antoinette was ever incapable of acting consistently and prudently! The fall of Loménie and the recall of Necker had within a few short hours produced a most extraordinary revulsion of feeling, as the Baron de Besenval wrote: "Such a sudden change from rage and despair to the joy and enthusiasm which resounded through Paris, has never before been seen." The names of both King and Queen were joined with Necker's and frantically acclaimed by the mob, their expiring popularity seemed to revive by association with his name; and at the very height of the joyous enthusiasm, on the day following Loménie's ignominious flight, whispers of Marie Antoinette's attitude of esteem and sympathy for the disgraced Minister, began to be heard. It became known that she had sent Loménie her portrait set with precious stones, that he was speedily to be made a cardinal; that his nephew the Abbé de Loménie had been appointed coadjutor to the Archbishop of Sens; and that his niece, Madame de Carnisy, had been installed as one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting. Marie Antoinette, according to Madame Campan, felt "she was in honour bound to make such amends as lay in her power, to the man whom she was sacrificing to the turbulent temper of the nation." This feeling was both natural and generous, but it was, nevertheless, a deplorably foolish one, for it obliterated the excellent impression which had been created by the dismissal of the Archbishop.

The recall of Necker in 1788 marks the close of any political action on the part of Marie Antoinette, until the outbreak of the Revolution. For a few months after his return, well knowing, as the Comte de Provence remarks, that the Minister could hardly bear to acknowledge even the King as his superior, discouraged and disheartened as well by so many vexations and failures, she retired altogether into the background and only

very occasionally put in an appearance in the King's Council Chamber. Soon, however, spurred on by harsh necessity, she will be forced once more into the open. She will come out of her retreat, made wise in the hard school of misfortune, purified by suffering, and ennobled by the greatness of the object in view and by the perils confronting her. She will forever have done with mean passions, foolish vanities, and unworthy designs; she will in short have become that queenly being, of whom Mirabeau—amazed at her courage—declared "The only man about the King is his wife!"

CHAPTER VII

THE QUEEN AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

On one point only, but on a most important point, did Marie Antoinette encounter any decided opposition from her amiable, kindly Consort. Louis XVI, during almost the whole of his reign, steadily declined to allow her to interfere in Foreign politics. The King, as a matter of fact, was imbued with the hereditary sense and instinct peculiar to his House where questions of foreign diplomacy were concerned, and it was truthfully declared of him that he was more at home in European than in French diplomacy. He had a sort of instinctive distrust of Maria Theresa's policy, which was naturally considerably furthered by the filial deference of his Consort, the Queen, and he well understood the danger to his Throne and country of the " Austrian System " which had now been in force for some years and which completely subjugated French political interests to those of Austria. Hence his constant effort to shake off if possible the yoke imposed by the Imperial Court and his determination whenever it was a question of foreign affairs, to resist alike the entreaties and the injunctions of Marie Antoinette, all-powerful though she was where home affairs were concerned. Hence that protracted, determined, almost daily recurring struggle between the Royal pair, the outstanding incidents and events of which must here be briefly indicated.

How to maintain and foster the Austrian-French alliance and by so doing, add to the power and prosperity of her native land, should be according to

Austrian ideas, Marie Antoinette's chief aim in life, the meaning, so to say, of her very existence. Her marriage to the Dauphin had been planned for this and for this alone. Fifteen years earlier, Maria Theresa, having with great sagacity perceived that every conflict with France resulted in the loss to Austria of a town or a province, determined to become the ally of France and so profit by the power of her erstwhile opponent. In this she was but following the approved Austrian method. To unite the Royal Houses of France and Hapsburg would surely tend to consolidate this political liaison. But for the union to prove really successful it behoved that the Bride who was destined to be its pledge, should realise its importance and be ready to do her duty towards it. She was to become the "Keeper of the Alliance," and all Marie Antoinette's education had been directed to this end. Before the departure of the Archduchess for France her mother had unceasingly impressed upon her that she must never forget that she was "bonne Allemande" and that any criticism of such an attitude she must merely treat with derision. It was impressed upon her, moreover, that she must be able to do honour to the blood which flowed in her veins by strenuously supporting and strengthening by every means in her power the beneficient and sacred bond which indissolubly united her native land with the land of her adoption. Such was the act of faith which was impressed upon Marie Antoinette, the dogma which was instilled into her. She accepted it blindly and rejoiced in it. Two years before the death of Louis XV she said on one occasion: "This is my duty, and it will be my glory if I can in any way contribute to the preservation of the alliance between the two Houses."

Immediately after the accession the suggestions of the Imperial Court begin to be alarmingly frequent and urgent. Almost every letter from the Empress

contains some suggestions, some important lesson to be learnt. On May 30th 1774 Maria Theresa writes as follows: "Our interests are not merely those of family affection, but those of our countries as well and are so firmly linked together that, to accomplish what is needful, we must hide nothing from each other and go on as the last King was in the habit of doing. Notwithstanding the difference in circumstances, everything must proceed in exactly the same manner as before. Any lessening of our mutual understanding would kill me. If only we work for and with each other, no one will interfere with the results of our labours and Europe will enjoy happiness and peace." A few days later another epistle urges Marie Antoinette to look on Mercy as "as much your Minister as mine. The interest of both Kingdoms and also the interest of our holy religion demand that the bonds of family affection and political affairs should be indissolubly cemented together."

Those of our readers who are curious as to what lies beneath all this kindly interest in French well-being are recommended to glance through the confidential despatches of the Minister Kaunitz and also those of the Ambassador Mercy. The cynical avowals to be found in these despatches afford a striking commentary on the Empress's epistles. Kaunitz traces in a confidential despatch to Maria Theresa on the death of Louis XV, the line of conduct which he considers advisable to adopt towards the new Queen. He declares that in order that her influence may be of real service to Austria, she must, in a manner, disguise it and employ it only on really great occasions as, for example, when the nomination of a Minister for foreign affairs is in question, so as to make quite certain of such an one's entire devotion to the cause of Austria. At the moment, Kaunitz proceeds to remark, the Duc d'Aiguillon but poorly represents the "honour

of France," being a man with an extremely bad reputation and one, moreover, who is perpetually mixing himself in intrigues: still, as he is "a being void of understanding" and as he will never, in all probability, venture on any great or bold stroke in political matters, he is exceedingly useful to Europe in general, and, it may be added, especially to Austria. He had better therefore remain where he is and the Empress and Mercy should endeavour to induce the young Queen to embrace this point of view. Mercy quite approves of all this. He also, and he is far from disguising his feelings, does not think much of d'Aiguillon, but he is "so useful to us" that he must, if possible, be kept on. Marie Antoinette's hatred of the Duc d'Aiguillon prevented her falling in with the wishes of the Imperial Court on this particular occasion: unfortunately, both for herself and for France, she was usually more complaisant.

Mercy's interference in French diplomacy by means of Marie Antoinette is everywhere apparent; his hand is traceable in all the various negotiations which are undertaken at Versailles. He does not merely use his influence where the choice of Ministers is in question, but he concerns himself with their Ambassadors. A letter of melancholy interest indicates but too clearly how unconsciously Marie Antoinette took part in the doubtful game and how blindly she acceded to highly unsuitable demands. "I have just heard," she writes to Mercy in March 1782, "that M. d'Usson (French Ambassador to Sweden) has had an attack of apoplexy and is probably dead by now. Apparently M. de Pons (Minister plenipotentiary at Berlin) is to succeed him. Do tell me at once what you think of the Berlin position. It might be of importance to the Emperor (her brother). I fancy that M. de Vergennes seemed to be inclined towards a M. d'Esterno, who is not much in evidence but who is said to be very

clever and a great friend of M. de Vergennes. I said that I should like to consider the matter, of course, with a view of consulting you. Be sure, however, to keep the affair very secret, for *the King himself* does not yet know of M. d'Usson's severe illness."

There can be no doubt that Marie Antoinette, torn as it were between the memories of her birth, her native land, and her family affection, and her present duties as wife and mother and Queen Consort of a great nation, was in a strange and difficult position, and that she was frequently called upon to grapple with extremely perplexing problems. Sometimes, to her credit be it said, she rebelled altogether, and courageously opposed the suggestions of her relatives. By so doing she laid herself open to the vehement reproaches of her mother and also of her brother, accusations of carelessness, selfishness, nay, even of cowardice, were hurled at her head, she suffered deeply on these occasions and it is only just that history should accord her her due. Unfortunately her resistance was a rare occurrence. Usually the lectures of the Empress, which were studiously followed up by Mercy, had their intended effect upon the young Queen, and it is distressing to perceive in the Austrian Ambassador's despatches the complacence with which he views Marie Antoinette's willing eagerness to inform him of everything, to repeat to him as he writes, "all the little details which the King and the Ministers keep her in touch with and which she is good enough to pass on to me." Some of these confidences are to be met in the records of the various Courts of Europe. It is well-known that Caroline, Queen of Naples, elder sister of Marie Antoinette, hands over, without scruple, to Austria all the secrets of the Kingdom of Naples, and anxiety is manifested when the Court of France appears to be lending itself to similar indiscretions. Cardinal de Bernis, French

Minister to Rome, is courageous enough to write to Vergennes a letter really intended for Louis himself, which contains the following passage: "One must be very careful that Europe is not led to suspect that Austrian influence is all-powerful at Versailles as well as at Naples."

The sudden death of Maria Theresa, at the close of the year 1780, should, in the ordinary course of events, have tended to lessen Austrian influence to a very great extent. The affectionate, tender-hearted Queen was almost stunned by the unexpected blow. She gave not one single thought to all the scoldings, the unjust reproofs from which she had so often suffered in past days: all the old grievances, the long, tedious lectures, were forgotten; she remembered only that her mother had loved her and that she was dead. For a time Marie Antoinette's health was seriously affected by her grief, and her medical advisers were extremely anxious about her. As soon as she was well enough to write, she poured her heart out to the Emperor Joseph II her eldest brother, as follows: "Oh my brother, oh my friend, now in my dear native land I have but you! . . . Never forget that we are your friends, your allies—always love me!"

The Emperor is fully alive to the situation. Henceforth he shamelessly makes use of the affection, the confidence, the deference felt by his sister towards him as Head of her House, and overwhelms her with advice; he never tires of inciting her to interfere in all State affairs, and, whenever she appears to be weary of the exhausting game he is ready and prepared with some biting observation, well calculated to rouse her to further efforts. "By allowing you to amuse yourself with bestowing trifles and little favours, they deceive you into imagining that you are of some real importance, but all serious matters are arranged without your knowledge" he tells her, and with discreet

brotherly raillery he indicates to his young sister the various little feminine wiles which might be profitably employed to cajole and subjugate her husband: "To instruct a pretty, clever, witty woman like yourself how to proceed when she is well acquainted with the individual concerned and knows how to manage him and what to do when she really desires anything would merely be a waste of time," declares the wily Emperor, and he confides to Mercy that "she must bestir herself for the benefit of her family," meaning of course, for the benefit of the Imperial House of Austria.

For a long time all this manœuvring had but poor results; for Louis XVI, "saying but little as usual," to quote Marie Antoinette, carefully avoided in conjugal *tête-à-têtes* any allusion whatever to foreign politics and confined his remarks to vague generalities which compromised no one nor anything. "The Queen has succeeded in everything," remarks Sonlavie, "with the exception of gaining the confidence of His Majesty regarding diplomatic relations with the House of Hapsburg," and Marie Antoinette herself confirmed this remark in excusing herself to Joseph for her non-success as follows: "When I have learnt the *quarter* of any business, I have to contrive to learn the rest from the Ministers by pretending to them that the King has informed me of the *whole* of the affair. When I reproach the King with not having informed me of such and such matters, he does not get angry, but he seems ill at ease and sometimes replies good-naturedly that he had forgotten to do so."

Marie Antoinette thinks that this prudent silence which she designates as "the King's dissimulation" is the result of his early education and of the advice bestowed on him by various Ministers. In a letter to her brother she says: "His natural want of confidence was increased by his tutor. Even before my marriage M. de la Vanguyon had warned him against

the power that his wife would endeavour to gain over him, and that man's black soul took delight in terrifying his pupil with all manner of fantastic lies invented against the House of Hapsburg. M. de Maurepas was not so wicked, but he also found it useful to adopt the same methods with the King. M. de Vergennes follows the same plan and possibly makes use of the correspondence regarding foreign affairs in the cause of lies and deceit. I have spoken very plainly to the King and more than once he has replied angrily to me." She closes rather despairingly: "I am not deceived at all as to my position; I know that politically (she means in foreign diplomacy) I have not much influence over the King. . . . Without being ostentatious or untruthful, I allow the general public to think that I count for more than I do in reality, for if they did not believe this, I should have still less power than I have."

The Queen was quite right on one point. Louis' silent opposition to all her blandishments was caused by Vergennes, who was ever ready with his calm, clear-sighted, practical advice. He struggled against Austrian political pre-eminence during the greater part of his own political career. He certainly clung to his portfolio; "I have vowed to expire in office," he was wont to declare; but he was quite incorruptible—he would, any day, have resigned rather than lower his flag. Louis was well aware of all this and had the fullest confidence in his faithful servant. He even carried on a secret correspondence with Vergennes, and Marie Antoinette never knew what transpired in the mysterious messages which were, according to Soulavie, locked up in his small apartments under the Smithy.

When in the year 1787 Vergennes expired, after enjoying thirteen years of power, there was intense excitement in Vienna and the question as to who was to replace him assumed immense importance from the

Austrian point of view. Mercy's candidate for the important position was the Comte de Saint-Priest, and accordingly he proceeded to sound the Queen in his favour, and was vexed to find her rather indifferent. She had, indeed, already remarked to Mercy during Vergennes' illness that she "could not help thinking that it was odd that the Court of Vienna should be by way of suggesting Ministers for the Court of Versailles," and the Austrian Ambassador had been deeply shocked. "What a strange scruple!" he ejaculated, and he could not get over his surprise and dismay. A few days later the Queen sent him a note informing him that "the death of M. de Vergennes is momentarily expected, and most probably the very little (*le très petit*) Montmorin will replace him." Montmorin! The friend of Vergennes, the nominee of Louis himself! Mercy, aghast, immediately hurried to Marie Antoinette and so eloquently did he exhort and plead that she at last agreed, "more through coercion than by persuasion," as he says himself, to go and find her husband and beg him to consider Saint-Priest's application; but all in vain: the port-folio went to Montmorin, to Mercy's intense indignation.

Kaunitz accepted this reverse philosophically: "If," he remarked, "Marie Antoinette were Queen Consort in any country but France, she would not be allowed any influence whatever in foreign or in home affairs"; and he declared that Montmorin must be "swallowed" and pains must be taken to explain to the "creature" (*cet animal*) the great importance of the Austrian alliance. As for the Queen, she must make the best of a "bad bargain" (*mauvais payeur*). All turned out much as he had predicted. Montmorin, a well-intentioned individual, possessed neither the weight nor the understanding of Vergennes; consequently it was not difficult, according to Mercy, to "make him go straight." The Queen daily acquired greater

influence: indeed, during the months following the death of Vergennes she attained to the very height of omnipotence, and Mercy, behind the scenes, was never so powerful as during this period. When, three years later, he was obliged to leave France, he recommended La Marck and this very Montmorin whom he had formerly distrusted to take his place as far as possible with Marie Antoinette. They both kept up a constant correspondence with him, and so was formulated the legend of the notorious "Austrian Clique," which was believed to be selling France to the foreign power—that murderous legend which was to be so unjustly linked with the name of the unfortunate Marie Antoinette and which was eventually to hound her on to her doom.

The Queen's attitude towards foreign politics in general has been indicated as far as may be in the preceding pages. It must now be more particularly considered, and special reference must be made to the two occasions on which she took an active part, namely the Bavarian political affair of 1778 and the Dutch business which occurred in 1784.

On December 30th 1777 Maximilian Joseph, Elector of Bavaria, died without issue, his nearest heir being Charles Theodore, the Elector Palatine. The acquisitive instincts of Austria were at once aroused. "What a splendid way of rounding off the Empire!" exclaimed Jospeh II, and at once, without losing a minute, he drew up a treaty with the Elector Palatine, by which in exchange for certain portions of territory in the Low Countries the House of Hapsburg would acquire a good half of Bavaria. All seemed very simple on paper but the actual realisation of the projected idea offered many difficulties. Prussia was by no means disposed to tolerate such aggrandizement on the part of her hereditary enemy, and France, on her part, was not so convinced of the indissolubility

of her alliance with Austria as to view with complacency her ancient adversary steadily advancing towards the boundary of the Rhine. A common interest served to create a *rapprochement* between Berlin and Versailles, and both Courts resolved to oppose the proposed annexation by every means in their power. Naturally the fact that the Queen Consort of France was by birth an Austrian Princess complicated the situation and opened up many possible and probable difficulties. At the opening stage of the negotiations Marie Antoinette, with her natural good sense was disposed to take exception to Joseph's audacious scheme, and she confided to Madame de Polignac that on the present occasion she "really thought that her brother was only thinking of his own advantage." Her opinion leaked out at Versailles and reached Vienna, where it caused great indignation. Mercy at once repaired to the Palace and spoke his mind pretty freely to his royal pupil, and he was well backed up by the "august imperial family," to quote his own words. Every imaginable form of persuasion was employed to induce the young Queen to throw herself into the affair and to exert her whole influence on behalf of Austrian policy. Joseph, Kaunitz, Mercy, and the Empress were all equally insistent, and for a whole month Marie Antoinette was subjected to what might almost be termed persecution. It is not wonderful that in the end she yielded to the wishes of her friends; Austria gained nothing by her capitulation, while she herself lost a very great deal.

She began the contest by having a long talk with Louis, who steadily held his ground against her. "The greed of your relatives will ruin everything," he said in response to her reproaches. "They began with Poland; now we have begun the second volume with Bavaria; I am grieved that you should have anything to do with the affair!" The Queen

retired discomfited and resolved, as she told Mercy, to have nothing more to do with the matter, and for some time the prayers, the reproaches, the bitter complaints of the Emperor, the Empress, and the Ambassador did not avail to rouse her into action.

Suddenly her health, the prospect of becoming ere long the mother of the Dauphin, gave her fresh courage and more assurance in attacking the King. Vienna hailed with rapture the news of her hopes of motherhood and entreaties to bestir herself in the good cause were redoubled. "I intend to send a special express letter every week," declared the Empress, and Marie Antoinette was once more forced out of her natural indolence and induced to act contrary to her own better judgment. From now on she was perpetually sending for Maurepas or Vergennes, sometimes indeed for both at once, and begging them to interest themselves in the cause of Austria and to gain the support of the King's army for her brother the Emperor. Her entreaties availed nothing; the two statesmen held firm, and so did Louis XVI. Frederick was to be allowed to do what he pleased to prevent Joseph's encroachments and France would remain passive.

At this stage, faced with such imminent peril, the Austrian Court had recourse to the grand manner, and Maria Theresa set before her daughter, in moving terms and in what is almost prophetic language, the menace that a too powerful Prussia would one day sooner or later be to Europe. "He (Frederick) means to be Dictator and Protector of the whole of Germany! . . . For seventeen years he has been the scourge of Europe with his despotism and his violence. . . . This matter should interest all princes. If he is permitted to acquire territory, what a prospect for those who will come after us!" Joseph, for his part, appealed to his sister's womanly feelings and tried

to move her by pictures of the coming warfare: "As you will not try to hinder war, we will at least acquit ourselves like men. In any case, dear sister, you will not have cause to blush for your brother—he will ever merit your esteem."

These words, these threats, these solemn warnings were profoundly disturbing to the distracted Queen. Her distress and agitation were piteous. At last she promised Mercy to make one more supreme effort, and she went to the King and pleaded for her family, and finally tried to touch his heart by referring to her own grievances: "I did not try to hide from the King the pain that his silence caused me. I even declared to him that I should be ashamed to tell my dear Mama how he treated me concerning a matter of such interest to me personally." It was a difficult position for a man who was very much in love, and the King was deeply distressed by his wife's tears and reproaches, but his simple goodness enabled him to make the only possible reply. "I was quite disarmed," confessed Marie Antoinette to her mother, at the tone in which he said: "*I will accept all the blame and I have not another word to say in the matter.*" And he kept to his resolution; no private sentiment could prevail against his fixed resolve and what he considered necessary for the public good. If only Louis could have shown this same far-seeing energy in home-affairs, if only he could have always maintained this same courteous and determined firmness when dealing with his wife, how many mistakes, how many misfortunes would have been avoided!

The indignation in Vienna was intense when Marie Antoinette's failure with the King became known. The French Ministers were declared to be "fools" and "imbeciles," and the Queen came in for her share of the abuse and was most unjustly termed indifferent and supine. At Versailles, where couriers

were constantly announcing the humiliating retreat of the Austrian army and melancholy excuses and lamentations instead of the former blustering messages arrived from Vienna, Marie Antoinette became more and more woe-begone and melancholy with each day. "She has lost all her gaiety," says a contemporary writer; "she is always abstracted and silent and seeks solitude." One day the King found her weeping in her apartment and was much distressed. He did his best to comfort her and expressed his sorrow at not being able to get her relatives out of the awkward position they had so foolishly ventured into. She declined, however, to listen to her husband and loudly accused the French Cabinet of weakness and bad faith, and one day soon afterwards she so far forgot her dignity as to attack Maurepas violently to his face and when he, greatly embarrassed, muttered a few evasive sentences, she replied haughtily: "Sir, it is now the fourth or fifth time that I have spoken to you of these matters without any response on your part. I have kept my patience so far, but things are becoming too serious, and I will not put up with such treatment any longer." Mercy was actually obliged to preach moderation and beg the Queen not to make things worse for Austria by useless exhibitions of temper.

In the end all that Marie Antoinette's utmost efforts could effect was that France should act as mediator and take the initiative at a Congress at which after interminable discussions it was finally decided that everything should revert to its original state; thus the only visible results of the struggle were that France was less confident than of yore, Austria less well-disposed, and the Alliance consequently less firm.

The unhappy affair had other unfortunate consequences. The public generally had been fully aware of Marie Antoinette's interference, of her importuning

her husband and her angry scenes with the various Ministers. From the halls of Versailles details which were both true and false had, as usual, filtered down to the faubourgs of Paris, where it was angrily muttered that the Queen had desired to sacrifice France to Austria and had tried, while the army was already engaged in America, to begin a tussle with Prussia, which might easily have led to a European war. There was general indignation, and if hopes for the birth of a Dauphin suppressed for the time being any manifestations of the popular rancour that rancour was none the less buried deep in the hearts of the people, to reappear as wreckage long lost sight of in the depths of the sea reappears under the action of tempest and storm.

A few years later a second event brought about by the over-weening ambition of the Emperor, revived unpleasant memories and was the cause of fresh, though similar, grievances. The guardianship of the mouth of the Scheldt had by ancient treaties been accorded to Holland and there resulted in consequence a certain amount of inconvenience to the Empire to which, at the period of which we are writing, a great part of the Low Countries belonged. One day in 1784 an Austrian warship suddenly attempted to force the passage, and was immediately fired on and finally taken by the Dutch. Joseph was enraged at the incident; he declared that a deliberate insult was intended and as reparation he insisted that Maestricht and the surrounding territory should be ceded to Austria. A further demand aimed at the exchange of the Low Countries for the Bavarian electorate. Thus the old quarrel was in a fair way to be renewed; moreover, it was a direct challenge on Austria's part to France, the hereditary protector of the Dutch republic. Joseph, however, appeared to be convinced that Louis XVI would look favourably upon his plans

and as usual his sister was expected to put forward the affair in the best possible light.

For some time, perhaps as a precautionary measure, he had been complaining to her of the "high tone" that was taken with him and that by now the Alliance was a mere matter "of words and compliments"; and he begged the Queen to tell him frankly "as a good compatriot and friend" if Louis and Vergennes actually looked at affairs from the same point of view. He must have clearly understood the meaning of Marie Antoinette's embarrassed non-committal reply, in which she declared that she deplored the fashion in which her brother was treated but that the King was weak enough to allow letters to be written and forwarded which were not actually his own composition. Joseph had, however, by this time made up his mind to act, and he informed Marie Antoinette that he was sending troops against the Dutch "to bring the Republic to its senses" and that he confidently counted on support from Versailles in this urgent matter: "Here dear sister, is the propitious moment in which the King, without ceasing to be a good King of France, can furnish proof that he is also my ally, my friend and my brother," the Emperor grandiloquently declared. As usual the Queen's first instincts were fraught with good sense and she was well aware of what were her real interests and those of her adopted country. She tried to avoid all connivance in the matter and declared that she was powerless against the King's mysterious methods and the stubborn attitude of the Ministers. She piteously endeavoured to reconcile her earnest desire to keep out of the affair with her instinctive loyalty and filial deference to her House. Finally, with her back to the wall, she ended by giving in once again to her brother's demands, to Mercy Argenteau's exhortations, and she was speedily involved in a fresh struggle in which her quick temper and the fear

experienced at the mere idea of beholding any break in the Alliance and warfare "between brothers," between France and Austria, soon led her much further than she had at all intended. Nothing could be done with Vergennes, so she waged war against her husband. More than once, according to her own accounts, she contrived to shake his resolution, even to make him promise to support the claims of Austria; alas! at the very last moment, Ministers always overthrew all that she had managed to achieve and regained mastery over the King. "I blush to confess," she wrote to Joseph, "that whenever he has seen Vergennes he is no longer the same man," and she continued bitterly: "It would be necessary to know him as I do, to judge of the miserable support and assistance afforded by his character and his predjudices."

Meanwhile matters were proceeding from bad to worse, and a critical point was reached towards the end of 1784. An ultimatum addressed by Joseph to the Dutch Republic resulted in the despatching of two French Army Corps to the Flemish borders and to the banks of the Rhine; moreover a very stiff despatch informed the Emperor of this decisive action, laying all the blame on Austria and predicting very grave results. The Queen was naturally thrown into a frantic state of despair and one can hardly blame her. Her mistake lay in the fact that she openly expressed her disapproval of the French policy and that she apprised the Imperial Court of what was intended and detained the courier who was the bearer of the despatch, in order to give Joseph time to modify the terms of his ultimatum. "You must," she writes, "have been overcome with astonishment at this odious despatch. I have kept back the courier for a whole week and that is all that I have been able to do. The whole affair seems so momentous that I will endeavour to see the King and M. de Vergennes together and to

talk to them both in such a determined fashion that this most impossible Minister will feel extremely uncomfortable."

The interview took place, and a highly exciting one it proved to be—Mercy has provided a description of the stormy scene: At first Marie Antoinette endeavoured with a fair amount of calmness to extract some promise in favour of Austria. Meeting with no success, she suddenly lost her temper altogether and overwhelmed Vergennes with a flood of "furious abuse." He, taken completely aback, was speechless for a moment or two, and then, turning to the King, observed that in the face of "such suspicions, there was nothing left for him but to retire at once," and this he seemed to be about to do. The King, however, affectionately took his hand and held him back, and Marie Antoinette, by now both terrified and tearful, added her entreaties to those of her husband. The Queen indeed, wept bitterly, and a sort of reconciliation was patched up. Doubtless, as she grew calm, she perceived that she had gone too far, for in an interview which she had soon afterwards with the Swedish Ambassador, she remarked: "You may be quite sure that I shall never interfere when once a matter is absolutely decided and that, in any case, I shall never forget, in spite of my affection for the Emperor, that I am Queen of France and mother of the Dauphin." The same sentiments and expressions are to be found in a note written about the same time to the old Marshall de Ségur, who was Minister of War and moreover in favour of active measures.

The Queen was perfectly sincere in what she said, but with the general public, which judges by appearances and not by intentions, a disastrous impression had been created, and there was deep indignation. A small detail, quite insignificant in itself, intensified the already existing bad feeling. After eighteen months

of profitless discussion, the whole vexatious question was settled on the part of Austria by a complete withdrawal, whilst France obtained from Holland as a kindly consolation-prize for her unworthy ally, a trifling indemnity of two million *tournois*, and the Royal Treasury, to oblige the Republic, promised to advance the required sum. The money was forwarded to Austria in instalments, as convenient, and it was a current idea among the populace that all the gold in France was being squandered away in paying for Austrian absurdities. A country priest actually inscribed in his parochial register that "the Queen was robbing all departments to send money to her brother the Emperor." The amount of the sum was increased and multiplied to a truly ridiculous extent, and an absurd letter was circulated in Paris which was supposed to be written by Joseph to the Baron de Breteuil, and which despite its palpable forgery, was accepted by many credulous individuals. "You must," so it runs, "send me another fifty millions. It will be an easy matter to charge the sum to the current debt in the revenues of your good King and to create some new tax. . . . If by any chance you cannot pay just declare yourself bankrupt. The Queen will sing, Monsieur will groan, the Comte d'Artois will laugh, the good King will weep—nevertheless he will do what you want. As for me, I care about nothing so long as I get the French money."

A characteristic anecdote, which bears on this affair, throws light on what was the state of public feeling in the matter. A girl of the town, Marie Millot by name, happened to meet the Duc de Coigny, one of the Queen's friends. "Is it true," she asked, "that the Queen sends enormous sums to her brother, sums which are said to amount to more than two hundred million francs?" "Quite true," replied Coigny gravely; "he has already lost us more than

two hundred millions and we are not yet finished with him!" This joke was accepted in all good faith by the foolish woman, and figures five years later in the evidence brought against the unfortunate Queen at her trial before that bloody tribunal which decreed that she should suffer by the knife of the guillotine.

Naturally, such absurd stories were not listened to in political and diplomatic circles, but there existed nevertheless a false exaggerated impression regarding Marie Antoinette's attitude towards Austria and her House. The employees of all the Powers declared that they were constantly hindered and circumvented by the Queen's supervision. If any negotiations went wrong, she alone was held responsible: "The various cabinets of Europe," Sonlavie declares, "were all alike terrified by Marie Antoinette's power and only too delighted to harm her in any way and to curtail her influence. One day all that their secret agents effected to destroy her will be made known."

It is evident that both at home and abroad the Queen of France was slowly becoming, as it were, an alien, a usurper, who was the power behind the Throne, seizing on authority and misgoverning her adopted country, offering up to her own ambitions the heritage of centuries, the sacred traditions of France.

Certain it is that a few months later, at the time of the famous scandal of the Diamond Necklace, these recent occurrences gravely influenced public opinion and contributed to excite the malevolence of the populace and the hostility of parliament, and that the scandalous acquittal of the man who had so grossly insulted Marie Antoinette was a slap in the face to the Queen and was also intended as one to her brother, Joseph II. It is not necessary to relate in detail in these pages all the well-known story, which has, moreover, been so well told by a first-rate historian; a moral, merely, shall be indicated by quoting the words

which are alike so apt and so true of the Comte de Provence: "When the Necklace affair," he says, "came to the Queen's knowledge, she, not knowing all the details, but being well aware of the change in public opinion towards herself, imagined that a striking verdict in her favour would prove the whole truth. She was mistaken, because in matters of this kind it is always more expedient to hush up than to proclaim from the housetops. But she thought of nothing but the affront she had sustained."

The just indignation which Marie Antoinette felt, not merely at the actual verdict but at the popular manifestations which on the same evening and on the succeeding days prolonged the insult, the rejoicings, the cries of "long live the Cardinal," the illuminations in Paris, the deputations and congratulatory addresses before the Rohan mansion, and all the deep indignation she felt at the abominable outrage had the effect of disgusting her forever, if not with politics at least with official life and with all that brings Royalty into contact with the populace. Henceforth she seeks more and more, as far as her position allows, to live in private; she becomes an increasingly tender mother to her children; to her friends she is a gracious and charming companion. In leaving behind the plots, the intrigues, the vile manœuvres in which she has been involved, without always having been able successfully to avoid the many pitfalls or sufficiently courageous to steer clear of evil counsellors, it is both refreshing and restful to contemplate the Queen in her natural rôle, which becomes her so well. It is a delight to gaze on the lovely young mother leaning over her infant's cradle, to see her playing governess in the schoolroom and acting the part of the graceful hostess, sometimes at the Trianon, sometimes at St Cloud.

Marie Antoinette was a passionately devoted mother. She broke away from all the Versailles traditions and

the customs of the Queens who had preceded her. She would never, like Maria Lecszinska, have placed her daughter at the age of three years in some distant convent or have heard, almost by chance, from an attendant of the death of one of her sons. All her life Marie Antoinette had loved children; she liked to have them about her and to join in their games; this habit of hers was, as may be remembered, one of Mercy Argenteau's grievances in the days when she was the Dauphine. The passing years and the queenly crown had not altered her in this respect at least. One day near the palace she met the tiny Elzéar de Sabran, who was hardly out of leading-strings. She picked him up and kissed him over and over again. Next day she said to his young mother: "Do you know that yesterday I actually embraced a gentleman?" "Madame I do, for he has been boasting about it," was the reply, and countless other anecdotes might be recounted about Marie Antoinette's love of children.

Her delight before the birth of her first child, after eight years of married life, is really touching. Her letters to her mother are full of charming confidences. "I am getting so stout I have been childish enough to measure myself!" and then she goes on to ask all kinds of questions about babies; she thinks that swaddling clothes are too confining; she feels sure that it would be best not to imprison the little creatures' limbs, but to allow them to lie at ease in one's arms or put them flat in a bassinette: above all they must be continually in the fresh air to make them well and strong. After the birth of Madame Royale, her motherly pride is displayed in a thousand little homely details about the baby's rapid growth and her surprising progress. "Soon she will be weaned, she is so big and strong, she might be two years old. . . . She has been able to say *Papa* for two days now. Her teeth are not through yet but one can feel them." Then a

little later on: "She walks all by herself, and if she falls, gets up again without help. I must tell my dear Mama of such a charming surprise that I had a day or so ago. There were several ladies in my daughter's room and I made one of them ask her which was her mother; just think, the little darling, without any prompting, smiled at me, and toddled to me, holding out her arms! It is the first time that she has really seemed to know me. I do believe that I love her now more than ever!"

The Queen was the mother of four children. Not quite three years after the birth of her daughter, in October 1781, a Dauphin was born, and great was the general rejoicing. Marie Antoinette had been so anxious, so excited just before the important event that her medical advisers had made the King promise not to divulge the sex of the child until two days after its birth. But Louis was too impatiently delighted to brook this long delay. In a very short time, after the birth of the child, he came up to his wife's bedside and announced importantly that "M. le Dauphin is waiting and demands an audience." The Queen raised herself and held out her arms to her husband, who embraced her rapturously; indeed they were so engrossed with each other that M. le Dauphin waited some moments in his attendant's arms before his father and mother were even aware of his presence. Three years and a half later the Queen gave birth to a second son, who received the title of Duc de Normandie and who in after years became the unhappy Louis XVII: her fourth child was the delicate little Madame Sophie, who lived only for eleven months.

Her little family henceforth made up the whole of Marie Antoinette's existence. Her purest joys her most bitter griefs were centred in her children. They were lodged quite close to her, in rooms which communicated with her own by secret stairs and doors. She was with

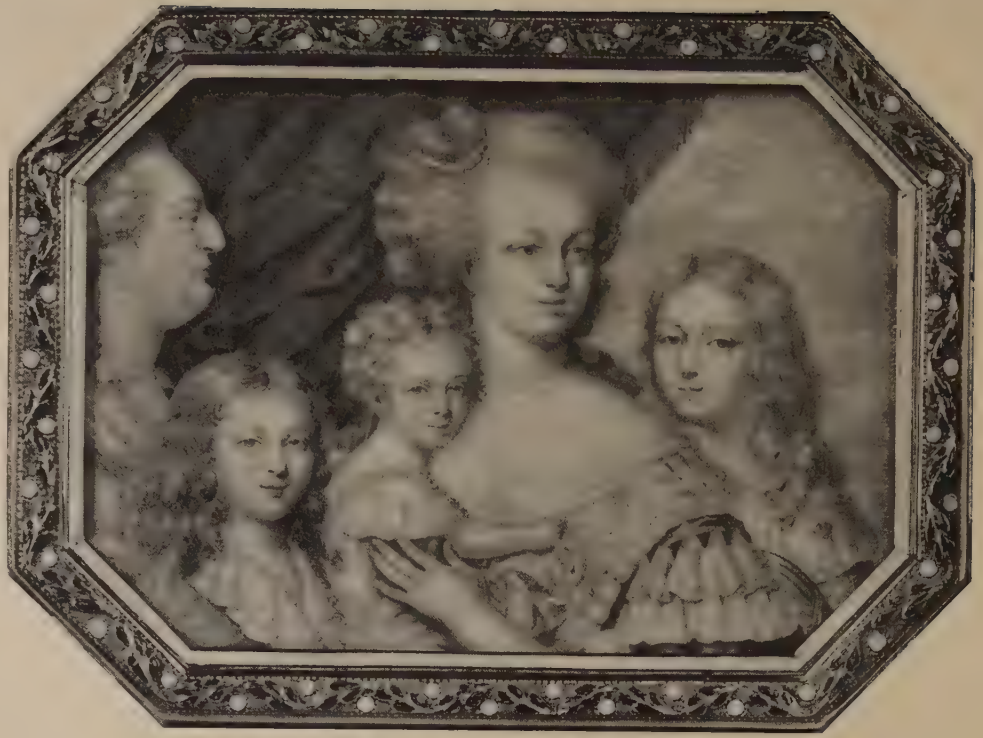
them at all hours, at their meals and at their infantile lessons; she nursed them herself when they were ill, and, better still, anxiously endeavoured to get to really know their characters and dispositions so as to be able to direct them and correct their faults. She is so absolutely given up to them that Mercy takes her to task and bitterly deplores what he terms her "indifference." "Ever since she has been so occupied with the education of her august daughter," he writes to Kaunitz, "and now that the child is always with her, there is hardly ever a chance of discussing any important or serious matter; every moment is disturbed by the gambols of the Royal infant. . . . She hardly listens to anything that is said, and she understands next to nothing." Happy state of indifference! Would that it could have been more frequent!

It must be allowed that Marie Antoinette was possessed of a true educational instinct, that she had a really remarkably intelligent outlook on the suitable manner of bringing up children. A valuable document exists to testify to this truth. It is the written instruction which she addressed to Madame de Tourzel, when that lady became governess to the Children of France on Madame de Polignac's departure abroad. "I give to Virtue that which formerly I confided to Friendship," the Queen had observed, when she conferred the important position on Madame de Tourzel. Soon afterwards she sent a long letter, in the course of which the mother indicated to the governess her personal wishes and ideas and she more particularly points out with remarkable discernment the various peculiarities in the disposition of the Dauphin, the little heir to the Throne. "He is like all strong, healthy children, very passionate and determined; but he is a good, loving, endearing child when he is not in a temper. He is very proud, and this trait, if it is well directed, may be of use to him in the future.

He repeats whatever he happens to hear and often; without wishing to be untruthful he adds what he would have liked to see happen. This is his worst fault and one that must be corrected." She advised Madame de Tourzel to use gentle measures rather than severe ones, as follows: "From his earliest infancy the word *pardon* has always been a stumbling-block. He will say and do whatever he is told as soon as he is naughty excepting pronounce the word *pardon*. He weeps most bitterly and there is a terrible struggle if that word is insisted on. . . He is not in the least conceited or haughty, and I do trust that he will remain so; our children learn all too soon who and what they are."

The Queen proceeds to explain to the governess the general system which she has followed in regard to her children: "I have always accustomed them to trust me in everything and when they have done wrong to tell me about it themselves. And I always, when scolding them, take care to appear more grieved and sorry than angry. They know that when I say *yes* or *no* that the matter is finished, but I always try to give some reason that they can understand, for I do not want them to think that I am acting by caprice."

The death of the little Princess Sophie in 1787 was a great grief to Marie Antoinette, the first, as she said herself, of all those sorrows which were so soon to be heaped upon her. "Come," she wrote to her sister-in-law Madame Elizabeth, "come and we will weep together over my poor little angel. I need you to comfort me in my sorrow." To some friends who thought to console her by reminding her the little dead child was but a baby, she replied weeping: "But you forget that she would very soon have been my friend." At about this time the health of her eldest son began to cause her the deepest anxiety. "His figure



QUEEN MARIE ANTOINETTE AND CHILDREN

Madame Royale, The Dauphine and the Duc de Normandie (afterwards Louis XVII)

(Artist unknown. Jones Bequest, Victoria and Albert Museum)

ace p. 194

is not straight," she wrote to her brother the Emperor Joseph; "one hip is higher than the other, and the spine seems crooked; he is feverish every day and very thin and weak." She tried in vain to persuade herself that it was merely the result of growing too fast and said to herself that the King who was now so robust had been extremely delicate and sickly in his infancy. Country air had soon restored him to health, why should not his son also grow strong as he grows older? Like most delicate children, the little Prince adored his mother and was almost worshipped by her in return. "The other day," relates a contemporary, "he implored her to dine with him in his room, and so she did, but I am sure she swallowed more tears than food!"

The Queen's younger son, the Duc de Normandie, was as strong as his brother was delicate. "He is like a peasant's child," wrote the Queen fondly, "so big, so rosy, so fat." The "darling love" (*chou d'amour*), as she called him, was his mother's pride and joy. "He is a perfect dear; I adore him and he loves me in his baby way, though he is a regular monkey; he is so strong and he is not so passionate now." When the evil days began in earnest, her maternal duties were, as she herself says, the only pleasure in her life, her one and only source of happiness. "We have put all the three in the one room. My children are almost always with me and comfort me a little," and again: "When I am very sad, I take my little son in my arms and embrace him with all my heart, and that consoles me for the moment." It is to Fersen that these touching lines are addressed. No one will understand and sympathize as he does.

To this habit of Marie Antoinette's of having her children always with her must be put down one of her private acts which was severely and most unjustly criticised by the public—namely the purchase of St Cloud. The Trianon and La Muette, when all the

numerous suites had been accommodated, were no longer large enough to take in the whole family, accordingly the Queen bethought herself of asking the King to buy St Cloud, which belonged to the Duc d'Orléans. It was, moreover, supposed that the air in that quarter was better and more bracing than anywhere else. All remembered how Louis XVI had benefited by his stay at Meudon in his youth, and it was hoped that St Cloud would have the same happy effect upon his offspring. The King was most willing to fall in with the Queen's wishes, but there were long and tedious discussions before the affair was terminated. The Duc d'Orléans profited by Marie Antoinette's eagerness to acquire the property, and made her pay six millions for what was not worth more than three. There was, moreover, great extravagance over the necessary repairs and alterations. The whole matter was looked upon as a piece of foolish extravagance, and the legend '*de pars la Reine*,' which the keeper of the castle inscribed in a notice which was fixed to the outer grille, was considered to be an encroachment on the King's just rights.

All in vain was the extremely modest existence which was *de rigueur* at St Cloud. In vain did the Queen, to please the people of Paris, mingle with the crowd on days of general holiday, holding the Dauphin by the hand and moving freely among those who were watching the fountains play or the boatmen on the river. Nothing availed to dispel the suspicions and the dislike of the people, and sometimes she even heard rude whispers as she passed such as "We are looking at the '*grandes eaux*' of St Cloud and also at the Austrian (*l'Autrichienne*)."

The simple life of St Cloud is also practised at the Trianon when the Court is in residence there. No more gorgeous receptions, no more entertainments during which dancing goes on all night, no more society-plays in which the Queen, of yore, used to play

and sing '*royalement mal*,' as a critical spectator had once remarked. *The Barber of Seville* in 1785 is the last piece to be performed in the theatre of the Trianon. Gone, too, for ever are all the wonderful, bejewelled robes, the marvellous costumes, the enormous hooped skirts, the stately befeathered head-dresses. Every one wears little linen frocks and muslin crossovers, like the peasants, straw hats during the day and natural flowers in the hair at night. The Trianon is now merely a country-house in which one lives with one's family and a few chosen friends, and the manners and habits are those that prevail, as a rule, among the higher classes in the country. When the Queen enters the reception-room, the ladies go on with their tapestry-work or with their duets on the piano, and the gentlemen do not stop their games of billiards, piquet, or tric-trac. The domestic staff is limited to what is strictly necessary, and except on very rare occasions the great dignitaries of the Court are conspicuous by their absence.

Pleasures consist in walks, in music, in meals partaken with the children in the open air. Sometimes on Sundays there is dancing in the afternoon upon the green lawns to the sound of rustic music, and on these occasions the gates of the Castle are thrown wide and anyone who is decently clad may enter in. The Queen walks among these unknown guests, embraces the children, tries to imagine that she is popular. This is the period of the various amusements of the little rustic village, but the reality is quite unlike the absurd misrepresentation, which portrays the Queen as the farmer's wife, the King as a miller, the Comte d'Artois as a huntsman, and all the other fine people playing a sort of masquerade. What really happens is that, occasionally after dinner, Marie Antoinette amuses herself by watching her servants look after the cattle, milk the cows, make butter, and so on,

and sometimes for a few moments she herself takes part in these rustic pursuits.

It might have been thought that a nation which was talking about "equality" would be pleased with this simplicity; that minds which Jean Jacques was cramming with aspirations after the simple life and innocence, that citizens who were forever prating about economy and fraternity, would have been delighted. It was all too late: a fixed opinion had been formed and nothing could alter it. For too many years, at first at Court, and then in Parliament, and finally among the middle classes, the Queen had been looked upon as the scandal, the scourge of the century; an odious flood of songs and libels, of which the mere titles are frequently an offence to decency, had destroyed her reputation in the eyes of the public, had associated her name with the Messalinas, the Fredegondas of history. The credulous mob was convinced that it was she and she alone who pillaged the Treasury, betrayed the country, prevented reform, perpetuated abuses, and that the disorders of her private life were equalled only by her misdeeds as Queen Consort.

Thus the great change in her life was met by a cruel scepticism, and the radical improvement which years and experience had wrought in her was jeered at as a pose of mere calculated hypocrisy. In the streets of the capital, at the opera, in all public resorts, murmurs, loud execrations even, greeted her appearance. In the Place Dauphine an effigy representing Marie Antoinette was publicly burned, and at Versailles to the walls of the palace was attached a notice inscribed with this distich:

Louis XVI interdit, Antoinette au convent,
D'Artois à St Lazare, et Provence regent.

The Queen's heart was torn by the flagrant injustice. Her letters, her sayings, reveal at this period of her

career profound anger and dislike extending to the whole nation, including all the people of France towards whom at the time of the accession she had felt so very differently. Louis XVI for his part resigned himself to the inevitable, and became more and more absorbed in his old amusements of hunting and handicrafts. He had given up his studious habits, seeming to have lost all hopes of success, almost the wish to succeed, indeed. "He is getting stouter," wrote Mercy Argenteau to Jose "and when he returns from the chase he eats too much. His character becomes brutish!"

A monarch worn down and discouraged after his fourteen years of kingship, an exasperated Queen, a people seething with revolt! Such is the melancholy state of things when the nation was on the verge of that fatal upheaval which would forever decide the destiny of the ancient dynasty of France.

CHAPTER VIII

THE REVOLUTIONARY CRISIS

On the 27th of December 1788, Louis XVI, acting on the advice of Necker (who had, as we have seen, been recalled to power by Marie Antoinette some four months earlier) decided on the convocation of the States General. The Queen was present at the Council for the first time since the Minister's return and gave her support to the measure, to which, however, the greater part of the clergy and the nobility were strongly opposed. She also approved of the Double Representation or Vote by Head instead of by Order, which innovation was destined later to prove such a formidable weapon in the hands of the leaders of the Revolution.

The opening of the States General was fixed for the fifth of May, and on the preceding day, according to ancient custom, a great procession paraded the streets of Versailles. The three Estates of the Realm were all represented, and the King, the Queen, and the Princes of the Blood brought up the rear of the cavalcade.

The Queen, magnificently dressed and covered with jewels, presented a truly regal appearance. The King was received with a fair amount of cordiality, but an icy silence prevailed as Marie Antoinette passed by, a few, a very few feeble shouts of "*Vive la Reine!*" were occasionally audible, but were immediately suppressed by exclamations of "*Fidonc!*" and "*Chut!*" from the great majority of the onlookers, some of whom, indeed, were outrageous enough to cheer in honour

of the Duc d'Orléans as the Queen passed. The Duc had seen fit to separate himself from the princes and had joined the ranks of the Third Estate in the procession. The Queen naturally deeply resented the insult; she with difficulty sustained her majestic pose and, says an eye-witness, she cast a glance on her assailants which seemed to indicate that, though for the moment she had to endure their insolence, her turn would come.

On arriving at the Cathedral of Versailles, she had a sharp passage of arms with the Duchesse d'Orléans, who behaved after a highly insolent fashion, and at the close of the long, exhausting day, Madame Adelaide —so it is said—added a final drop of gall to Marie Antoinette's cup of bitterness. The Queen, almost beside herself with anger had exclaimed: " *Ces indignes Français !* "—to which the hard, unforgiving Princess replied drily: " Say rather, *indignés !* Madame! "

The actual opening of the States General, which took place next day in the Salle des Menus-plaisirs (a hall no longer of amusements!) afforded some slight compensation for the miseries of the preceding day. The Queen, who had arrived somewhat late, took up her position at the King's right hand on a chair of State which was placed two steps below his Throne. She looked very pale and grave as she sat silently listening to the debates. She was beautifully gowned in a violet sacque over a white satin petticoat dotted with silver. A circlet of brilliants and a heron's plume adorned her stately head. She had become rather stouter during the last few years and wore herself with even more dignity than formerly. Her complexion was still dazzlingly fresh and fair and her magnificent flaxen hair was as abundant as ever. The greater number of the deputies had never seen her and gazed curiously at her; many of them were soon impressed by her regal aspect and could not refrain

from comparing her with her heavy, common place consort, who resembled, as someone said, a kind of decadent Cæsar, being fat "like Vitellius and amiable like Antoninus."

The Queen, meanwhile, contemplated the Assembly, her gaze being fixed especially on the benches where were massed the members of the Third Estate. She almost, according to an eye-witness of the scene, seemed to be seeking to scrutinize the countenances, to be studying the expressions, of these men, among whom, as she well knew, were so many of her bitter enemies. She rose respectfully to her feet during the King's short speech and sat immovable through all the rest of the proceedings. It was impossible to guess at her thoughts from her outward aspect, but those close to her saw that an occasional "convulsive grip of her fan" testified to the intensity of her anxiety. Taken as a whole, her appearance at the Assembly was a success, and when she rose to depart at the close of Necker's speech, shouts of "*Vive la Reine!*" resounded in the hall. Surprised and delighted, she relaxed and smiled, whereupon the applause was loud and long, upon which she curtseyed with such extreme grace that all present were enchanted, and she returned to the Palace in a comparatively cheerful frame of mind.

However, a mere momentary impulse excited by her personal charm was powerless to prevail over perfidiously implanted prejudices, which were of such long-standing and had, moreover, been fostered by mad imprudence. The deputies of the Third Estate, far away in their country districts, had been well grounded in the notion that the Queen was the originator of all the evils that had befallen the nation; and the nobility, as we have seen, both disliked and distrusted her. There was a kind of league against her, as Mercy Argenteau said, or a "frenzy" as

Frénilly expresses it. And the Duc d'Orléans was the chief man in this conspiracy. He was not yet, it is true, the declared enemy of the Crown, but he was none the less dangerous. Marie Antoinette had recently refused her consent to his plan of marrying his eldest son to Madame Royale and this refusal added a fresh grievance to the long list of injuries which he already held against the Queen. Mortified and annoyed as he was, he was persistent in his underhand attacks and in encouraging the circulation of injurious pamphlets and caricatures. And it must be allowed that Marie Antoinette's attitude towards the Duke was far from prudent, for she openly treated him as a rebel and as an enemy to the Throne. In fact, the mutual dislike of Queen and Duke had by this time developed into violent and implacable hatred.

At this highly critical juncture, when so many dramatic events were taking place and whilst an expiring absolute monarchy was at death grips with democracy, it was the received general opinion that the Queen, in the Royal circle, was the one great bulwark of resistance to the demands of the Constitutional party and that the "Aristocrats" (to employ the language of the times) found in her their final and only support. She figures in Hardy's paper, which was the mouthpiece of the Parisian bourgeoisie, as taking the Dauphin in her arms and presenting him to Louis, with the words: "Behold the Hope of France, who will succeed you if you but maintain your Royal authority: if you do not do so the Crown will lose the whole of its prestige." In all political circles, in the halls of the Assembly as well as at social functions, the supposed alliance of the Queen with the Comte d'Artois was loudly denounced. The two were said to be engaged in a determined fight against reform; to be straining every nerve to keep France in her ancient

leading-strings in order to avert the hoped-for national emancipation.

In the course of years much reliable information has come to light which would seem to indicate that this is a false and unjust indictment. Comte Louis Philippe de Ségur, who was in favour of reform, describes how, during a conversation with the Queen, he found her to be depressed but resigned to the situation and in no sense violently opposed to it. As he took leave of her, she addressed him as follows: "I see that from what you have been told of me, you think me strongly opposed to your views. But to-morrow you will hear from me and you will then perceive that I am not as unreasonable as I am supposed to be," and the next day, as a matter of fact, the old ambassador received from the hand of Madame Campan—who had been sent by the Queen—a document drawn up by Mounier, the leader of the moderate party, setting forth the constitutional programme, to which the Queen was apparently not unfavourable. Several anecdotes sufficiently indicate that she distrusted the Comte d'Artois. In May 1789 she received from Angeard a confidential note on the condition of the national finances: "I am sorry," she observed, "that you should have shown this to my brother d'Artois." "But why, Madame? In families, in times of great misfortune it is usual to combine together, even though there may be little differences between the various relatives." "It is not at all," replied the Queen, "that my brother d'Artois does not love us, but he is pushed on by an infernal faction which will be the ruin of us all." The Marquise de Laage de Volude also testifies to the Queen's disapproval of the attitude assumed by the Comte d'Artois and, indeed, her disapproval was soon to be openly expressed to the intense indignation of the Prince.

Marie Antoinette was, however, unfortunately for

herself and others, of a changeable, variable disposition; she would veer almost suddenly from one opinion to another exactly contrary one and sometimes be in favour of concessions, sometimes, on the other hand, determined on resistance at all hazards. Fundamentally she was inclined to be energetic and firm, and she was always vainly seeking to urge on the King to energetic action. Unfortunately, from a lack of reasoning power and also, as Lafayette observed, from "the desire of shining in misfortune rather than seeking to avert it," the energetic measures which she induced her Consort to enact were never followed up and therefore appeared to be fruitless demonstrations and a mere squandering of her undoubted courage. As a matter of fact, she can hardly be blamed for this very natural trait of character; according to Lamartine: "Women can only be courageous where it is a question of the virtues of a throne. They are very frequently heroic but seldom statesmanlike."

Truth to tell, at the present juncture Marie Antoinette's part in politics was an extremely secondary one. Necker would certainly have opposed any kind of active interference and, besides, her motherly heart was occupied with more painful, pressing cares. The little Dauphin was dying. He had for three months or more been living at Meudon in the hope that fresh air might prove beneficial, and at first this had seemed to be the case. Now, however, the disease was making very rapid progress: the child's spine had become quite crooked, and his legs were so powerless that he had to be supported when he tried to walk. His pale, emaciated little face bore witness to his sufferings. Sickness had made him very difficult to manage—he would hardly allow anyone but his mother to come near him. On June 2nd he became much worse and the King was sent for. As soon as Louis arrived at Meudon, Marie Antoinette threw herself into his

arms and with sobs and tears implored him not to enter the room where the dying child lay, the sight was so distressing, so heartrending. By one o'clock in the morning all was over and the heartbroken parents shut themselves up in the castle to mourn their loss. It is almost unbelievable that the deputies of the Third Estate two days after the Dauphin's death and before the funeral had taken place should have forced the doors of the King's apartment to make him listen to their political views, but such was the case. They added, it is true, a few cursory expressions of condolence on the King's bereavement. "Are there then no fathers in the Assembly?" Louis is said to have murmured sadly.

A few weeks later, on July 11th, there was sudden grave news. The King had just dismissed Necker, who was suspected of being too favourably inclined towards the National Assembly. The Marshall de Broglie had been appointed Minister of War, Fonlon was made Controller-General, and the Baron de Breteuil Prime Minister. Had Marie Antoinette any hand in these appointments? Although there is no authentic proof that this was the case, Necker believed that she had, as his son-in-law states and Weber gives credit to the supposition in one passage of his Memoirs. Certainly the appointment of Breteuil, a great friend of Marie Antoinette, seems to prove that she had a hand in his appointment. The choice, in any case, was not a brilliant one, for Breteuil was a man of very limited insight, a mere courtier, in fact, quite unfit to cope with the perils of the desperate situation. His deep voice and his heavy tread, which sounded, according to Madame de Staël, as though it would "evoke an army out of the ground," gave him a semblance of power, but it was a semblance merely.

The King's enactments were made known that same evening in Paris and their effect was disastrous:

an era of reaction, of violent measures, was foreseen and the dissolution of the Assembly and declaration of State bankruptcy seemed imminent. Insurrection was almost immediately rampant in the capital, and two days later occurred the fall of the Bastille, the massacre of the garrison of the ancient fortress and the murder of de Launey and Flesselles, whose heads were carried in triumph on pikes through the streets. The populace had the city at its feet, and the curtain had risen on the most bloody, the most horrible of dramas. The fury of the poeple was specially directed against the unfortunate Queen. All the old tales to her discredit were brought to light once more; the tales of France delivered over to a foreign power, and of thousands of millions sent to the Emperor of Germany. Mercy, in a letter to Joseph, mentions distractedly what he terms "an absolute frenzy" against the Queen of France. "The public fury is such," he writes the same day to Kaunitz, "that in the garden of the Palais Royal a price has been put upon her head and upon that of the Comte d'Artois." The friends of the Queen and the Polignacs especially were also assailed with violent threats; bloody placards announcing the vengeance of the people shortly to be wreaked upon them were posted everywhere and the Duchess was hanged in effigy.

On July 16th the Queen summoned the Duchesse de Polignac and told her of the imminent peril. "I fear the very worst," she said, weeping; "in the name of our friendship, go—there is yet time to save you from my enemies." The King entered the room and added his entreaties to the Queen's. At first the Duchess declined to leave her friend, but finally she consented to do so, and that very same evening indeed, she fled, disguised as a lady's maid, together with her husband, her daughter, and her sister-in-law, the Comtesse Diane de Polignac. As she was leaving, a

note was handed her from the Queen: "Adieu, my dearest friend. Ah! this dreadful, this necessary word! . . . I embrace you with all my heart."

There was general panic at Court. By degrees it leaked out that the Condés, the Comte d'Artois, several ministers, and other great personages had fled. Within two days the Paris municipality had to make out 200 passports. Marie Antoinette was left almost alone. Nearly all her ladies and the great officers of her household had departed; the very menials were afraid to remain, and even the Abbé de Vermond forsook his "pupil."

It is not surprising that during the first melancholy days the Queen should be deeply distressed and cast down. "I meet no sympathetic, kindred soul," she complained, and in a sad little note to Madame de Polignac she wrote: "We are surrounded with troubles, misfortunes, and dangers. Everyone is leaving and indeed I am thankful to think that all who love me are far from me. I see no one, and I am nearly all day alone in my apartment. My children are my one consolation."

The departure of so many officials from the Court of Versailles had unfortunate results. The vacant posts were filled up anyhow, and many enemies of Marie Antoinette were, by means of what was known as the Orléans clique, slipped into the Palace. The Queen had good cause to know that she was surrounded by spies, ready to ruin and betray her, and she made no secret of her knowledge in a note to Madame de Polignac: "Do not answer this," she wrote, "unless you are absolutely sure of your messenger, and, above all, in any case, write nothing private, for everyone is liable to be searched and there is no safety anywhere. I, personally, do not write, nor do I wish that anyone should write to me by the post, though I very well know that neither I nor my friends ever write anything

in the least wrong. But I do not wish it to be said that I receive letters and that people should thus be able to invent tales about me."

After a time there was a sort of pause in the tension and the Queen perceived a ray of hope. "During the last few days," she wrote to the Duchess, "things appear to be looking slightly better. There are not so many evil spirits abroad or, at any rate, the good ones of all ranks and classes are more in evidence; this is a truly fortunate occurrence." Louis, at Necker's request, had spent a day in Paris and had been received with unbounded enthusiasm. The recall of Necker, now for the third time Minister, on the evening of the 4th of August 1789 when the nobles had voted for the abolition of privilege, the Queen's example in instituting drastic reforms in her Household, finally the despatch of the Royal plate to the Treasury, all these various events had contributed to some extent to calm the infuriated populace.

The Queen imagined this lull in the storm to be more genuine, more widespread than it was in reality. She had, moreover, received various old friends, who had for too long been kept at a distance and who now, in the hour of danger, returned to her. The pleasure of once more beholding these familiar faces was balm to her wounded spirit. "It is at times such as these that one learns," she wrote, "to know what people are and to recognise those who are really faithful. I am discovering so many persons who are truly attached to me, to whom I hardly ever gave a thought," and she began to have hopes of a serious reaction in her favour. She heard reports that the country in general feared that the so-called reforms would be revoked, that there was a dread of famine, and that consequently public opinion was daily becoming more and more openly averse to the National Assembly. It is quite certain that the Queen at this juncture had no idea of

the violence and the extent of the general disaffection. Like many others, she anticipated a series of risings, a sort of popular Fronde, rather than complete political and social revolution; and she planned various measures which she trusted might be beneficial, such as the dissolution of the Assembly and the establishment of the Throne in some provincial town; in Rouen possibly, or in Metz, whence, whilst granting a few concessions, the power of the monarchy might be gradually re-established. Nothing was definitely decided, but vague rumours of plots were in the air. The Assembly took alarm and fears of a counter revolution began to be generally entertained.

In the autumn of 1789 an unfortunate incident occurred which set the smouldering embers of disaffection ablaze. The loyal regiment of Flanders had arrived at Versailles, and the Bodyguard, by way of a welcome, planned a grand banquet in honour of the new arrivals: this duly took place in the Riding School of the Palace on the evening of October the 1st. The King, the Queen, and the Dauphin showed themselves towards the end of the entertainment and proceeded to make the round of the tables. All drank to the health of the Royal visitors, and there was loud enthusiasm. It is said that the Assembly was jeered at and that a few soldiers tore off their cockades which were composed of the new colours; it is, however, certain that the Queen and her ladies did *not* distribute white cockades when they passed, as has been falsely stated. Other and similar demonstrations occurred within the next few days and made a tremendous stir among the demagogues. It was an easy task to exploit and exaggerate all that had happened, harmless as the whole affair actually was, and to declare that the sovereign-will of the people was threatened. There was actually very real misery in the faubourgs of Paris and the starving people were all too ready for

action, but only women were allowed to enroll in what was almost an army corps. They were, when all was said and done, even more desperate than the men, and besides no soldier would dare to aim at them.

In the afternoon of October the fifth 1789 Louis XVI was shooting at Meudon and the Queen was at the Trianon, when suddenly the alarm was raised that a horde of seven or eight thousand women (some of whom were really men in disguise) was advancing on Versailles, with loud, furious, bloody threats and curses. The National Guard, it was reported, was also approaching, led by Lafayette. He had at first declined to move, but his resistance was soon borne down by his creatures and he was now ingloriously marching at their head. Meanwhile in Paris a stormy sitting—called forth by the King's veto on the Declaration of Rights—was in progress and Mirabeau was thundering against the Court and loudly denouncing the Queen's influence. Before nightfall the whole Royal family was together in the Palace; ways and means were being considered by the various Ministers; intense excitement, indescribable confusion prevailed. During the discussions and whilst St Priest was urging the necessity of immediate flight to Compiègne (as yet a possible, and for a few moments a seriously considered step), the surging mob from Paris was beating against the iron railings of the Palace, whilst the viragoes were yelling: "We will cut off the Queen's head!" The King was implored to use force, but he merely answered: "Gently, gently," adding "that it would not do to fire on women."

Louis decided to withdraw his veto at the National Assembly and received Lafayette, and he further gave orders that the Bodyguard at practically all the entrances of the Palace should be replaced by members of the National Guard; whereupon Lafayette declared that he would be responsible for everyone's safety and

retired to take some rest. "*Il dormait contre son Roi !*" (He slept, indifferent to the safety of his King) wrote Rivarol dramatically, and there is some degree of truth in this view of his behaviour—behaviour which Marie Antoinette was never to forgive or to forget.

Many historians have described the terrible events of those October days at Versailles, and one and all bear witness to the calmness, the courage of the Queen, though she well knew that the bloody threats were levelled at her, for she had listened to the shrieks and yells of the furious mob. "I know," she said to those about her, "that they have come from Paris to murder me, but my mother taught me not to fear death." She absolutely declined to fly with her children as she was urged to do, and declared that she would remain with the King. The Duc de Normandie (Dauphin since the death of his brother) and his sister, Madame Royale, were with their Mother, and she sent them for greater security to the King's apartment. A few devoted friends, Fersen among them, spent the evening with her. Towards two o'clock in the morning everything seemed quiet and Marie Antoinette retired to her room to snatch a little rest. She did indeed sleep for an hour or so, but there was a terrible awakening in store for her.

At six o'clock, just as day was breaking, a handful of prowling rioters observed that the outer grille of the Palace courtyard had been left ajar. They immediately entered, forced the doors and rushed up the grand staircase, armed with guns and hatchets. A few faithful members of the Bodyguard who were inside the Palace tried to stop them and were murdered on the spot. "We want the Queen," yelled the furious viragoes, and rushed on along the galleries. At the door of the Queen's apartment there was another struggle with a few others of the Bodyguard, and Marie Antoinette had just time to rush half-clothed across

the Oeil de Bœuf to the King's apartment, whilst the murderers, in their rage at finding her empty bed, revenged themselves by wrecking everything in the room. At last Lafayette arrived with his grenadiers, who cleared the Palace of the rabble. A few anxious hours passed. An immense crowd of people thronged around the outer walls, shrieking and yelling, and amidst the terrible tumult, cries of "The King to Paris! The King to Paris!" were audible. Louis came out on the centre balcony and was received with a faint show of applause, but almost at once shouts were raised for the Queen. She came to the window her children in either hand. "No children!" yelled the furies. She looked at the levelled muskets and the threatening gestures, but she did not hesitate one moment: gently pushing back the children, she came out on to the balcony alone and stood motionless, her face pale, her abundant hair in disorder, her hands crossed over her bosom, disdainfully facing the howling mob. One man did actually aim at her, but his musket was beaten down by those around him, and the crowd impressed by the Queen's courage actually cheered her instead of shouting for her head.

When Marie Antoinette came back into the room, she whispered to Madame Necker: "They will make us go to Paris and the heads of our murdered guards will be borne before us on pikes!" And this was precisely what actually happened. Louis, urged by Lafayette, had yielded once again and had promised to go to the Capital and take up his abode at the Tuileries. Saint Priest, who was present at the scene, describes the King as being in sort of stupor, hardly capable of answering when addressed. "*Ah! Monsieur de Sainte Priest*," said the Queen to me, "*why did we not go last night?*" I could not help replying that it was not my fault that they had not done so; to which she replied: "*I know that too well.*" Finally

the King declared that he would start, and Lafayette turned to the Queen: "And you, Madame, what will you do?" "I know the doom in store for me," replied Marie Antoinette, "but my duty is to die at the feet of the King and in the arms of my children."

The order was given to prepare the carriages. In one huge coach were squeezed the King, the Queen, the two children, Madame Elizabeth, and the Duchesse de Tourzel. The Queen, who wore a black silk cloak and undress cap covering her hair, held the Dauphin on her knee nearly the whole way. In front marched some of the National Guard, dragging a few of the faithful Bodyguard along with them, and the procession was headed by the murderers, brandishing on pikes as trophies the bloody, livid heads of their victims. In the course of the dismal journey the comic actor Beaulieu climbed up by the coachman of the Royal coach, and whilst insulting the Queen by making horrible grimaces, amused the mob with vulgar jests and jokes. Following the Court-carriages came a long line of carts filled with sacks of flour and decorated with green branches. The mob followed after, shouting and yelling, some of the women on horseback, others perched on cannons.

The weird procession had started at half-past one in the afternoon; but so disorderly, so disorganised was it that over seven hours were needed to cover the few miles between Versailles and Paris. The eyes of all spectators on the route were fixed on Marie Antoinette, who, at times her head erect, dry-eyed and with fixed stare, seemed to be deep in sad reflection; occasionally, however, she leant out of the coach-window and spoke a few words to the crowd. "The King," she declared, "has always desired the good of his people. Evil has been spoken of us by those who have desired to injure us. We love the French nation." Sometimes those whom she thus addressed seemed

to be touched; as a rule her words were received in dead silence. Once the poor little Dauphin said: "I am so hungry!" There was no food to give him. The Queen consoled and petted him, and begged him to be patient, and she wept a little for the first and only time during that dreadful day.

As the procession crawled through Passy, the Duc d'Orléans with his children and Madame de Genlis were perceived on the balcony of a house which belonged to him. They looked at the scene below them with interest and curiosity, much as though it had been a theatrical display arranged for their benefit. The Queen looked back at them with a kind of horrified amazement; she fully believed that her cousin had had a hand in the terrible events which had just taken place, and she said shortly afterwards to Angeard: "The Duc d'Orléans did his best to have us assassinated." This, however, is the one bitter speech of hers left on record. Later on, when a deputation from the Châtelet asked her what were her impressions of that horrible day, she replied: "I knew everything, I saw everything, and I have forgotten everything."

The city clocks had struck the hour of nine in the evening when at last Paris was reached. The first move was to the Hôtel de Ville, with sixty deputies escorting them. Here they had to listen to a long harangue from Bailly, the Mayor, who, at the close of his discourse, remarked: "The King avers that he comes into your midst with pleasure." The Queen struck in: "Say with confidence as well," and the King, in tears, added: "Say also that I love my people, but that I cannot speak to them. . . ." They were made to show themselves at the windows, below which an immense crowd had gathered. There was an attempt at hand-clapping and a few cheers for the King and Queen. From the Hôtel de Ville a start was made for the Tuileries.

The night was cold and dark, and the arrival at the Palace was melancholy in the extreme. Since the year 1665 the Royal residence had been uninhabited, and the huge rooms struck deadly chill and empty. Some beds were hunted up and the Royal party installed itself as it best could. The members of the suite slept on tables and benches. Some sort of a repast was obtained, and the King ate enormously and seemed to have quite recovered his spirits. The Queen, on the contrary, appeared to be exhausted; her pride was at last overborne by her intense fatigue.

Several days were needed to make the Palace at all habitable. The Queen and her children all slept together at first in the same apartment, the latter on little camp-bedsteads. The room had to serve as a reception-room as well: it was here that Madame de Staël visited the Queen and wrote her impression of Marie Antoinette as follows: "She excused herself to us saying *You know I did not expect to come here.* She looked beautiful and careworn, and *her's is a face that one would never forget.*"

These two days of the 5th and 6th of October saw Marie Antoinette's first actual contact with the raging unchained beast of popular fury. Other no less terrible experiences lay before her, but these initial horrors made a very special impression upon her. For all who had been in any way concerned in the events of those days, either as instigators of the outrages or, like Lafayette, as having taken part in them, the Queen felt unmitigated and unconquerable aversion. However, for a time there was, as often happened during the two first years of the Revolution, an interval of peace—a kind of truce. The ancient deep-rooted sentiments of love and respect for the Throne were still so firmly embedded in the hearts of the majority of the people that, in spite of all that had occurred, genuine satisfaction was generally expressed on perceiving Royalty

once more, after half a century's absence, at home in the " good town " of Paris. When at seven in the morning the Queen awoke and looked from her window at the Tuileries, she was at first terrified when she perceived below her an enormous crowd, which was repeatedly calling her by name: she soon saw, however, that this time the crowd was a friendly one—though the people were noisy and familiar, they were not out with intent to murder. In the garden they sang and danced, and the Bodyguard embraced the fish-wives. They trampled down the turf and flower-beds, and in raucous but friendly tones they shouted for the Queen and the Dauphin, who showed themselves accordingly and were cheered to the echo.

All this was totally unexpected by the Queen, and her astonishment is plainly indicated in a letter which, that same day, she wrote to Mercy-Argenteau: " I am well; do not be anxious. If we could but forget where we are and how we came here we should be pleased with the people and especially so this morning. I talk to everybody. The soldiers and fish-wives seem to wish to shake hands with me: so I allow them to do so. I said, speaking for the King, who was beside me, that our remaining here depended on their behaviour; that we much wished to remain, and that all hatred ought to cease; but that if any more blood were shed we would at once fly in terror. Those near me all swore that all violence was over. I told the fish-wives to repeat to everyone what we had just told them." Three days later the Queen wrote again: " In spite of all the miseries put upon me, I still hope to win back the decent section of the people. With gentleness and patience it is to be hoped that we may at least manage to get rid of the horrible mistrust which existed everywhere and which has dragged us down into this abyss." And Mercy mentioned in a letter to Joseph the sort of popular revulsion of feeling towards Marie Antoin-

ette: "If we can only keep up this feeling," he remarked, "we shall see that she will give up her preconceived ideas and will act really sensibly." The Queen had, as a matter of fact, no false illusions, and she well knew how precarious was this change in the popular feeling. After a visit which Louis had made to the Faubourg Saint Antoine, which was highly successful, Bailly, in describing the scene to the Queen, observed tactlessly: "Your Majesty must be overjoyed at the joy of the good citizens." "Yes," Marie Antoinette replied, "the citizens are mannerly when the Masters go to visit them, but they are extraordinarily savage when they, in their turn, come to visit the Masters!"

Meanwhile at the Tuileries the new mode of existence was planned out. The King lived on the principal floor and the Queen took up her abode on the ground-floor, in rooms which gave on to the garden, the Royal children being installed in the Pavillion de Flore. Soon, however, Louis took both children into his suite of apartments and little staircases were specially built for their use leading down to the Queen's rooms. Towards the end of October the Princesse de Lamballe arrived at the Palace. She knew of the peril that threatened her friend, and came expressly to be near her and to share it. The Queen was only too glad to see her and the Princess took up her abode at the Tuileries and resumed her duties as Superintendent of her Majesty's Household. All the other Court officials were lodged in the outer wards of the Palace, and, although the number of these officials had been considerably reduced, they still constituted a formidable array. The list is both lengthy and curious, and includes a "service boy to Madame's ladies," an "employé of the Queen's table who serves as dish-warmer to Madame," cupbearers, men of the kitchen service, of the wine department, of the icehouse, of

the creamery. Six medical men in the King's employ and as many for Marie Antoinette, six others for the Royal children and as many more for Madame Elizabeth, and all these were only about a tenth part of those who in former days had lived at Versailles.

Amidst these ruins and relics of traditional pomp and state the Queen led a melancholy, monotonous existence. She breakfasted alone, and then received the King and her children. She afterwards attended Mass, and then followed long, lonely hours during which she either read or did needlework. At one o'clock the Royal family dined together. After the meal they played billiards with the King by way of a little exercise. A long, lonely afternoon followed. Supper was served at half-past eight and all retired to rest at eleven o'clock. When the weather was favourable, Marie Antoinette walked in the garden close to the Palace. On Thursdays and Sundays she received in the afternoons, and sometimes in the evenings she played at the *Jeu du Roi* (King's gaming-table). After a few weeks of this existence, Lafayette suggested that the King and Queen should sometimes show themselves in Paris to emphasize the fact that they wrere in no sense prisoners at the Tuileries.

Prisoners, however, they more or less were. Their goings-out and comings-in, their company, their plans, and above all else their correspondence—everything was watched, overlooked, and managed by a vast array of spies. To get a moment's private talk with her secretary, Angeard, Marie Antoinette was forced to receive him in her daughter's room and to make sure, moreover, that no one was listening at the door. She managed, however, to get used to the state of affairs; she even seemed to hope that some good might arise from it. "I defy the whole world to find me out in any real wrong," she wrote to her sister, the Archduchess Marie Christine. "It is an advantage

to be so watched and followed, for all my words, all my desires, and all my actions are devoted to the King's happiness in the first instance. For him, indeed, I would willingly lay down my life and also, in truth, for the happiness of all."

The hard discipline of misfortune had done great things. The Queen's views, as at present expressed, might have availed, had she but professed them earlier, to save the Monarchy. "My rôle now is to keep altogether in the background and to endeavour by total inaction to make them completely oblivious of me; I only want them to remember my courage. I must be without any kind of definite influence, whether with regard to persons or to affairs. They must inevitably return to us when they see and understand our real manner of thinking." This "manner of thinking" is several times referred to in the Queen's letters, and is eminently moderate and sagacious. "We must," she wrote, "watch for the moment in which people will have sufficiently regained their senses to be able to at length enjoy the wise and good liberty which the King has always desired for them, a liberty far removed from the license and anarchy which seek to overwhelm our beautiful country with every imaginable evil"; and, again, in another letter she wrote: "I only wish for such a state of affairs as will restore calm and tranquillity to this unhappy nation and to prepare for my poor child a happier future than ours; for we alas! have seen too much of horror and bloodshed ever to be truly happy again."

For a time, indeed, there was a faint hope that appeals to reason might have some weight, that the nation would allow itself to be convinced that these good intentions were truly sincere. In February 1790 Louis XVI paid a visit to the National Assembly and made a little speech to the deputies which was rapturously applauded. The Queen and the Royal children

met him on his return to the Palace in the gardens of the Tuileries, where many more of the deputies were assembled. The Queen addressed them in her turn. "I share, gentlemen," she said, "all the King's views and with my whole heart I approve of the measures which his love for his people have caused him to take. I present to you my son; unceasingly shall I speak to him of all the virtues of the best of fathers, and at an early age I will teach him to respect the liberty of the subject and to uphold those laws of which I trust he may one day be the stay and shield." The Queen's words were received with loud applause, clapping of hands and great enthusiasm.

Another popular demonstration occurred five months later at the feast of the Federation. The huge gathering of provincial representatives shouted "Long live the Queen!" "Long live the Dauphin!" and the enthusiasm was genuine. The Queen took the blooming, smiling child in her arms and held him up high so that all could see him. The day was chilly and damp and she wrapped her shawl round the Dauphin. The pretty, motherly action was applauded to the echo by the delighted spectators. At moments such as these it really seemed as though there might be peace once more between the Throne and the Nation.

But alas! there were only too many reasons for the deepest anxiety, and the attitude of the emigrés—to give them the name by which they were generally known—and more particularly the attitude of their leader, the Comte d'Artois, was dangerous in the extreme. He, ever since his flight from France, had hoped to checkmate the Revolution. He aspired to a chief part in the drama that was being enacted—to be, in fact, a sort of hero of the piece, but a very prudent hero, be it well understood, who was extremely careful of his own skin whilst exposing others to dangers. The Emperor Joseph very early in the day saw through

the designs of the Comte d'Artois and blamed him severely; he implored him to renounce what was known as the "Aristocratic Party," which he declared was bound to be most mischievous and to accentuate all the disorders of the Kingdom. The Emperor further begged him to return to France and thus do away with the dread which was felt of a faction which was opposed to indispensable reform, a dread which was irritating the nation and doing incalculable harm to the Royal family. The Queen, according to Mercy, had thoroughly approved of her brother's letter, which, however, had no effect upon the behaviour of the Comte d'Artois.

Vaudreuil was an intimate friend of the Prince, and his letters throw a melancholy light on the actual frame of mind of the Comte d'Artois. They abound in such phrases as: "Do not so easily give in to your prejudices against the Queen. . . Remember that public opinion is veering round in her favour though you distrust her, and that her courage has caused her to be admired by very many. Oh! Monseigneur, be very wary of the pitfalls which the people who detest the Queen are preparing for you!" and again: "You appear to me to be much alarmed because you have been told that the King and Queen want to make you play a secondary part. Ah! Monsiegneur, surely you have not fallen a victim to ambition? Must you then be everything or nothing?" But Vaudreuil's exhortations were unheeded.

The Comte d'Artois was well seconded by his cousin the Prince de Condé, who was more personally courageous but equally thoughtless, equally eager for aggressive action, ready to draw the sword in order to restore the old order of things. They both fearlessly contemplated alliance with a foreign power and an armed invasion of France. They would not have hesitated, in the event of Louis being declared prisoner,

to proclaim a regency with Monseiur (the Comte de Provence) as Regent. In the meantime they had a sort of Prime Minister in the person of Calonne, who since his dismissal had become Marie Antoinette's deadly enemy.

These schemes and plans naturally threw the inmates of the Tuileries into a state of the utmost consternation. The emigrés were actually playing into the hands of the revolutionary party, and the harm done can easily be imagined. In vain did the Queen passionately denounce the " madness " of these so-called benefactors; in vain did she write letter after letter to the Emperor imploring him to put some check on their misplaced zeal. Her time and trouble alike were wasted. Louis himself, who thought and acted just as she did, had no better success. The anxieties of the unfortunate King are to be read in his letters to the Duchesse de Polignac. " We must," he says, " be as much on our guard against the counsels and the wishes of our so-called friends as against the wiles of our enemies. It is most difficult to defend oneself against mistaken philanthropy. Our friends are either mad or imbecile, and perform all kinds of foolish actions and our enemies become more and more wicked every day! " The letter ends with these sad, touching words: " How is it that I have enemies, I who have always tried to be kind to all? "

Anarchy was rampant indeed in the Assembly, in Paris, and in the provinces. Pamphlets, placards, and indecent caricatures began once more to be freely circulated. Rioting was of frequent occurrence, even just outside the Palace walls, and there were numerous and frequently recurring plots against the Queen. Her life was more than once actually in danger, and Jacobin mistrust rendered her captivity almost intolerable. Certainly during the summer of 1790 she was allowed a few weeks' peace with her family at St Cloud,

but even there she was not permitted to go beyond any of the park entrances without an escort of the National Guard. Madame de Boigne, who was then a mere child, met her thus escorted at Bellevue; and gives this touching account of their meeting. "The Queen," she says, "was dressed in a white linen frock; she wore a large muslin fichu and a shady straw hat with broad ribbons tied in a big bow on her breast at the crossing of the fichu. She looked noble and beautiful in her simple attire, and on seeing her thus a prisoner my little heart was almost broken and I began to sob bitterly. The Queen knelt down in the grass and pressed her face to mine and we were both entangled in my long yellow curls with which I was trying to hide my tears. I fancy I still hear her whispering: "Hush! my little Adêle!" She held me a long time in her arms."

This little holiday at St Cloud was the only one the Royal captives were permitted to enjoy. Next year at Easter, when the King and Queen attempted to repeat the experiment, the mob swarmed round the Tuileries with insulting threats, the National Guard held their bayonets crossed in front of the horses of the Royal coach, and the journey had to be abandoned. The Queen, pale with rage, turned to Lafayette, who, on being told of the commotion, had arrived upon the scene and was vainly endeavouring to pacify the insurgents. "Well, Sir," she said bitterly, "surely now you will have the grace to allow that we are not free."

There were two men during these troubled times who made tentative efforts to approach Marie Antoinette with the object of attempting to stop the evil and to re-establish to some extent the Royal authority, two men who might, if they could but have worked in unison, have succeeded, owing to the popularity of the one and the genius of the other, in stemming the

popular fury. These two men were Lafayette and Mirabeau, and the Queen for long feared and disliked them both most heartily.

The mutual dislike between Marie Antoinette and Lafayette was of long standing. In his first youth he had frequented the Court, and his long, ungainly body, his red hair, and his awkward efforts to dance had provoked Marie Antoinette to laughter, and she had nicknamed him "Monsieur Blindinet." He was told of this, was hurt, and cherished feelings of vexation. However, when he returned to France from America, he was petted and welcomed at Versailles, and the Queen was most attentive to this "Hero of two worlds." But she never really liked him. She could not take his political views seriously and his pretensions to statesmanship annoyed her. She instinctively felt that his self-confidence covered a good deal of silliness, a kindly sort of silliness no doubt, but, as it were, ingrained, incurable, the cause of all his mistakes, his follies, his weaknesses. And she was right in her view of his character. Lafayette's overweening conceit made him a mere tool in the hands of those whom he thought to lead as he marched at the head of the rioters, dressed up in a brilliant uniform, and honestly imagining that he had saved their victims when he shed tears over them.

The part played by Lafayette during the bloody days of October changed Marie Antoinette's passive dislike into active hatred. She now believed him to be capable of any villainy, even of overthrowing the monarchy in order that he himself might seize on the supreme power. When one day he asked her if it were indeed the case that the Duc d'Orléans had aspirations towards the Crown, she replied with a meaning glance: "Sir, must one be a prince in order to aspire to the Throne?" Her feelings towards him were shown on many occasions. On the evening of

the flight to Varennes, she passed in the Place du Carronsel, close to the carriage of the General, and even at that critical moment she could not help laughing. "Just think," she said to Madame de Tourel, "what Monsieur Blindinet will look like when he finds out to-morrow that we are far away!"—and as she spoke she tapped on the wheels of the coach with her little cane. "I would rather perish," she said once later on, "than owe our safety to that man, who has done us more harm than anyone." And to Fersen she wrote: "It was not necessary to show me '*Sans torts*' letter to make me hate him. No doubt you know what good cause I have to detest him. He is the most dangerous, the most to be feared of them all."

Feeling as she did, her way of receiving Lafayette's repeated offers of help towards restoring the Throne which he had shaken, may be easily imagined. He was always politely but quite firmly repulsed. The vexation which he felt at the Queen's treatment of him is very apparent, together with his usual conceit, in the following letter to the Marquis de Bonillé: "The King is a good man with neither courage nor force of character; I could do what I like with him were it not for the Queen, who hampers me greatly. She often confides in me, but she does not strictly follow my advice, which would if she did, insure her popularity. She has all that is needful to attract the people of Paris, but her haughtiness and her temper which she cannot sufficiently control alienate the populace. I wish she would put more heart into it." The situation, however, remained unchanged, and Lafayette never made any headway with the Queen.

It was not so with the other man, who was of a very different nature and whose goodwill was much more to be desired. As early as September 1789 Mirabeau, alarmed at the rapid spread of anarchy, fearing too that the Monarchy would be completely annihilated,

had tried to gain the ear of the Court. "What can these people be thinking about?" he passionately exclaimed; "the King and Queen will perish miserably and the mob will dance upon their corpses . . . the danger of their situation must be brought home to them"; and he indicated himself as the only individual who would be at all capable of stemming the so rapidly advancing revolutionary tide. Madame d'Ossun, an acquaintance of the Queen, who knew the Comte de La Marck, Mirabeau's friend, told Marie Antoinette what were Mirabeau's desires and hopes, but the Queen would have none of it. "You will never make anything of him," she declared. . . . "I trust that we may never be reduced to the painful necessity of having recourse to Mirabeau."

The Tribune was excessively angry when the Queen's remark was repeated to him. He broke out into furious threats against her; he even declared he wished her dead, but on second thoughts he observed: "No, let her live—a humbled Queen might be of some use, but a murdered Queen would only figure as the heroine of a miserable tragedy." His October speeches are very full of venom, with the result that during the following month the Assembly passed a measure forbidding any deputy to be a member of the Cabinet, upon which Mirabeau exclaimed contemptuously: "Why do they not simply exclude M. de Mirabeau from the Ministry?"

It seemed as though an attempt to conciliate matters must be foredoomed to failure; however, before very long the imminence of the peril occasioned further parleying, but the first attempt made by the Duc de Lévis was again of no avail. However, in March 1790 Mercy tried his hand, and he had a powerful coadjutor, none other indeed than Fersen, who had remained in Paris after the October tragedy and who was a frequent visitor at the Tuileries, being secretly

admitted at all hours and on the most intimate terms with both King and Queen, helping them to cipher and decipher all the secret despatches. He told his sister that Louis and his Consort "place their whole trust in three or four individuals of whom I am one and the youngest." Fersen wisely begged Marie Antoinette not to lightly repulse the help that was offered her, not to turn an adversary who was willing to disarm into a determined enemy.

His advice was listened to, as is proved by this letter from the Queen to the Baron de Flachsland, a friend of Fersen: "I think with you," she writes, "that it is necessary to come to some sort of terms with the person in question. The difficulty is to know who will speak to him. I will willingly see anyone except Mirabeau himself. It is not that I do not believe that my woman's wit would impart to me more skill and force in addressing him than others would be likely to possess, but his immorality inspires me with such horror, I have such personal reasons for hating him, and I am so anxious to be more than prudent in everything that I do—there are, in fact, so many reasons against my seeing him that I must decline to do so. If possible, find someone capable of either placating or destroying the monster and let me know."

There was still a suspicion at the back of Marie Antoinette's mind, a horrible suspicion which held her back from any attempt to treat with Mirabeau. Had he had any hand in the odious October attack? Was he one of the plotters of that vile affair? She sent for La Marck and put the question directly to him. He absolutely denied any complicity on the part of Mirabeau, and, moreover, was able to prove the truth of his assertions. The Queen seemed relieved: had it been otherwise, she said, her invincible aversion would have prevented any kind of agreement or

association. La Marck told Mirabeau what had been the Queen's suspicions, and reports that the Tribune changed colour, became yellow, green, hideous, seemed indeed quite ſtunned at the very idea. He soon recovered his self-possession, and, when he knew that Marie Antoinette had at laſt made up her mind to treat with him, he was overjoyed and seemed, according to La Marck "to be overpowered with that sort of magic which the condescension of Royal personages exercises over even the moſt brilliant geniuses." There were ſtill a good many preliminaries to be gone through. "The affair is proceeding on regulation lines," wrote Marie Antoinette to Mercy, "but much as I favoured the idea at firſt the more I see the difficulties as I go on." Mirabeau, for his part, declared that he was not truſted, that secret plans and intentions were hidden from him. In treating with the Tuileries he felt, he declared to Bonillé, as though he were in the kitchen of a great house where there is always some hidden pot simmering on the fire.

It was La Marck who in the end contrived to solve the difficulty. He had a long talk with the Queen, in which both he and she showed their hands openly. He vouched for the good intentions of the Tribune and his fixed determination not indeed to recede, but not, on the other hand, to go any farther, and to put as it were the drag on without actually ſtopping the movement for reform. The Queen declared in reply that neither she nor the King dreamed of setting up an absolute monarchy again, that they would accept all the new conditions imposed upon Royalty. Mirabeau, in a note in his own handwriting, confirmed all that La Marck had said. "I promise," he wrote, "to the King loyalty, zeal, activity, energy, and a courage the extent of which he is probably far from having any conception of. I indeed promise him everything except the certainty of success, which never can depend upon

one single man and which only a very presumptuous and bold individual would dare guarantee in the present terrible disaster, which is undermining the State and threatening its Head. But it would be a strange individual indeed who would be indifferent or unfaithful to the honour of saving both State and Head, and I am not such an one!"

Finally, the famous contract was drawn up, which in exchange for the services of the Tribune gained him great pecuniary advantages—the payment of his debts, six thousand livres a month, with a million to be paid at the close of the administration. In consenting to these arrangements, Mirabeau did not at all betray his party or alter his avowed opinions; indeed, according to La Marck, "he accepted payment for *keeping* his own opinions." And in the following note he indicated his political convictions: "I declare that I believe a counter-revolution would be both dangerous and criminal and that I think it folly in France to hope for or to devise any kind of government without a Head equipped with the power necessary to administer all the public offices of the law. I am as absolutely opposed to any kind of counter-revolution as I am to any recurrence of the excesses to which the Revolution, in the hands of perverse and unskilful persons, has led the people into committing." It must, however, be allowed that to high ideals all pecuniary trafficking is repulsive and degrading. At the bottom of her heart the Queen felt that Mirabeau had sold himself, and she had a contempt for him that effectively checked any real confidence or esteem. This very natural feeling on her part more than accounts for her invincible reluctance to put herself completely into the hands of the man whom she felt that she had bought.

Mirabeau, on the contrary, very soon exhibits a sort of enthusiastic devotion for Marie Antoinette.

It is to her that he addresses himself, for her alone he speaks and acts, and he is never tired of proclaiming his admiration for her. "The King," he writes "has only one man about him—his wife. Her only chance of safety lies in the re-establishment of the Royal authority. I like to think that she would not care to live without the Crown, but I am perfectly sure that she will not be able to exist if she does not contrive by some means or another to preserve her Crown. The moment approaches in which she must try what effect a woman mounted on horseback with her child in her arms will produce. She will but be following a family tradition."

This enthusiastic mode of speech indicated his extreme desire for an interview, his ardent longing to behold the Queen face to face. He did not know her; mere correspondence was no longer sufficient for him. He wanted to see her, to hear her voice, and to speak with her. It took some time to bring Marie Antoinette to consent to an interview; but finally she agreed to meet the Tribune face to face, and a meeting was planned to take place after a most mysterious and secretive fashion. A Saturday, the 3rd of July, was fixed upon and the hour appointed was eight o'clock in the morning. A little summer-house—a sort of grotto according to Esterhazy—in a retired thicket of the Park of St Cloud was chosen as a meeting-place. The evening before, Mirabeau went to Auteuil, where he spent the night in the house of Madame d'Aragon his niece. Early next morning his young nephew, the Comte de Saillant, disguised as a courier, drove him over to a little side gate of the park. He knocked; the gate was opened to him at once, and just inside the gate was the summer-house in which the Queen awaited him.

When Marie Antoinette found herself actually face to face with the man who had been such a bitter enemy,

she felt inwardly a perfect revulsion of feeling, and the ill effects of her emotion lasted for several days. Outwardly, however, she was all grace and charm, and she opened the conversation with exquisite tact. Mirabeau also was much moved, almost timid indeed. Ever since his early youth he had so constantly frequented low company that he had lost the manners and graces of polite society, with the result that the man who could so easily sway an enormous crowd was awkward and ill at ease in a drawing-room. In spite of this, however, the talk soon grew animated and enthusiastic. Important matters were discussed and all went well. Marie Antoinette was won over by the eloquent words and the melodious voice of the Tribune, and he for his part was touched by the Queen's noble dignity and proud simplicity. The interview lasted three-quarters of an hour and at its close Mirabeau begged permission to kiss the Queen's hand. She smilingly extended that white hand, and he carried it respectfully to his lips, murmuring: "Madame, the Monarchy is saved." As Marie Antoinette walked rapidly away, Mirabeau stood listening to her footsteps on the gravel path and said as he rejoined his nephew: "She is great, noble, and unfortunate—but I shall save her!"

This interview confirmed Mirabeau's impression that the Queen, alone, had enough will and energy of purpose to follow out his ideas and carry out the necessary decisions and plans. "The Queen must be ever ready to spur on the King to action," he declared. But, though Marie Antoinette did not lack either courage or clear-sightedness, she was sadly wanting in perseverance and, moreover, she did not really trust the ally whom she had chosen. The favourable impression created by the interview at St Cloud very soon vanished. Memories of the past, some unlucky letters, some rather violent diatribes

in the Assembly revived all the old suspicions; and Mirabeau, writing sadly to La Marck, observed: "I am of very little use; I am listened to kindly but I am not trusted; they are more eager to *know* what I *advise* than to do what I suggest." And in another letter to an intimate friend he wrote almost savagely: "It is piteous. . . . It seems as though the house in which they are asleep may be reduced to ashes before they even rouse themselves!"

Mirabeau's plans were set forth in almost daily notes, which he sent secretly to the Court to guide his Royal clients in their dangerous path. His counsel was eminently sagacious. He advised them to show themselves frequently in public and to try by every possible means to regain lost popularity; he also recommended the forming of a group of faithful regiments to be commanded by a trusted general, and then he suggested that, given a favourable opportunity, the Royal family, protected by these faithful regiments, should remove to some neighbouring town, Compiègne perhaps, or Fontainebleau, and thence dictate terms to the National Assembly, with the view of re-establishing the authority of the Monarchy. No foreign warfare—which would only increase the unrest—but civil war, if needful: he was not in dread of that. "One must decide something," he wrote energetically on August 13th; "in two months' time civil war will almost certainly occur and perhaps it is a real necessity." He begged Marie Antoinette to grant him another interview, in which he hoped to be able to finally convince her. "Unless we act," he said, "all is lost," and he declared that the French nation was rushing to its doom.

The whole tenour of this letter upset and annoyed the Queen. She sent it in to Mercy, remarking that the "paper which I send you seems to be so strange and far-fetched that I have thought it necessary for

you to see it before it is talked of to you. I really think, frankly speaking, that it seems to me altogether mad. Is it possible that Mirabeau can believe that ever, and especially just at present, a suitable moment would arise for *us* to provoke a civil war? . . . This is my first impression regarding this note, of which the end appears to me highly unsuitable. Besides it is quite impossible to see Mirabeau; he must not expect it." This refusal was a bitter blow to Mirabeau. "A good but feeble King, a most unfortunate Queen," he exclaimed; "behold the abyss into which a too blind confidence or a too exaggerated distrust have led you! If I escape the general wreck, I will declare aloud from my retreat that I exposed myself to mortal peril in order to save others, but they would not be saved." And so from month to month the wearisome discussions went on; nothing was decided on, nothing was accomplished, and at last on April 2nd 1791 Mirabeau, feeble and worn out before his time, died suddenly, and with him expired the last forlorn hope of saving the Monarchy.

A month after Mirabeau's death the situation of the King and Queen had become almost desperate. There is no exaggeration in the Queen's description of what is taking place in the following letter to Mercy: "Our position is frightful, and only those close at hand can form any idea of it. There is only one choice here for us, either to concede blindly to all that the factions demand or to perish by the sword which is always suspended over our heads. Honestly I do not exaggerate the dangers; you know that my wishes have always been on the side of gentleness, of gaining time and consulting public opinion; but to-day all is changed; either we must perish or take definite action. We are very far from believing that definite action is free from danger, but, if by taking action we bring about our death, we shall at least expire

with honour, having done our duty towards ourselves and to our religion."

This supreme effort indicated by the Queen was an appeal to foreign powers in a sort of romantic manner which she had thought out herself. To have recourse to neighbouring powers and, if necessary, employ their armed forces was not in those days the odious plan of action that it would be in ours. Indeed, such methods had been followed on various occasions. The proceedings of the Huguenots under Coligny, of the Catholics with the Ligue, and of the great Condé in the days of the Fronde may be given as examples. Still, in spite of the pressing danger, the Queen had scruples. She in no sense contemplated or desired an armed invasion, a counter-revolution inspired in France by foreign bayonets. "We will not ask any power," she wrote, "to march their troops into this country." What she contemplated as possible was an armed demonstration near the frontiers, whereupon the King would at once place himself at the head of the French army; the Emperor—such was the pleasing line indicated for her brother—would retire before the firm and decisive attitude of Louis XVI; and the latter would re-enter Paris at the head of his army in the guise of a conqueror and of the preserver of France amidst general joy and popular enthusiasm.

Purely imaginary all this and most assuredly a perfectly impossible plan, the more so as Joseph II was no longer Emperor of Austria. He, in spite of his rough way of treating her, had always retained a certain amount of affection for his sister. But Joseph was dead and his brother Leopold, who had succeeded him, was almost a stranger to Marie Antoinette. She was only ten years old when he left the Court of Vienna to go and live in Tuscany, and she had never seen him since. It is difficult to keep up brotherly affection in such conditions. To all overtures the Emperor

returned evasive answers. "We must realise," wrote Mercy Argenteau, "that the Great Powers will not do nothing for nothing. It is a humiliating truth but it *is* truth," and to Bonillé he wrote coldly: "You know the proverb—'Help thyself and thou wilt be helped.'"

What Austria meant by helping oneself was to fly from France and establish the Court on the frontier and there to gather round it a body of faithful troops sufficient in number to constitute a fairly numerous army. This accomplished, it would be then time enough to agree as to modes of action.

To escape from the Tuileries, which was in reality to escape from prison and regain freedom, was, as we have seen, most anxiously desired by Mirabeau; but he wanted the departure to be made openly and the destination to be a town near the capital. The plan which the Emperor had in view was of quite a different order. It was more a kind of voluntary exile, a temporary refuge in some town on the frontiers, and Montmédy was at first thought of. The imminent danger overcame all hesitation and silenced scruples, and in May 1791 flight was resolved on, and the famous and unfortunate journey to Varennes was planned.

Fersen and the Marquis de Bonillé arranged all the details. Fersen undertook the preparations for the journey; Bonillé was responsible for the military arrangements, and he, for the sake of safety (and it was probably a very good idea) was most anxious that the Royal family should separate, that Louis should fly in one direction and Marie Antoinette and her children in another. The Queen refused. "She sent me," writes Bonillé, "this remarkable answer saying that if we wished to save them we must save them altogether or not at all." He further insinuates in his Memoirs that the Queen rejected his proposals

because she knew how the people hated her and feared for her life were she to be arrested without the protection afforded by the presence of the King. Marie Antoinette would never have been capable of harbouring such an ignoble thought and was almost certainly perfectly sincere when she made the noble and dignified assertion that she "desired ever to share the dangers and the fate of the King."

I will not dwell on the details of that fatal flight to Varennes. The sad story has been already so well, so dramatically told. On June 21st at Bondy the refugees were safely out of Paris, and Fersen, disguised as a coachman, took leave of the august travellers, hoping that perhaps the worst of the danger was past. In his Journal he wrote: "The King said to me '*Monsieur de Fersen, whatever may happen to me I shall never forget what you have done for me.*' The Queen wept bitterly." From Mons, two days later, Fersen wrote to his father: "All is lost, and I am in despair. The King has been stopped at Varennes, only sixteen leagues from the frontier! Picture my grief and pity me!"

What, indeed, would his grief have been had he then been fully aware of the agony, the misery of the return to Paris, the insults, the death-cries, the suffering from hunger, from thirst, from the burning heat of the June day. If he could have seen the tears of the poor little Dauphin and his adored Queen bowed down, crushed, her head sunk on her breast, looking, as those who saw her declared, almost like an old woman—and she was barely thirty-six years old! Next morning when her maid took off her cap she saw with astonishment that Marie Antoinette's abundant flaxen locks had turned quite grey. But, in spite of all, she was haughty enough in her bearing when Lafayette appeared upon the scene. Her boxes had been left in the carriage and, on re-entering the

Tuileries, she handed him all her keys as though he had been a jailor. He drew back and declined to take them, whereupon she disdainfully tossed them into his hat.

The Queen was by the general public held entirely responsible for the King's flight. Fréron in his daily paper actually printed the atrocious statement: "She is gone, this wicked Queen who combines the wiles of a Messalina with the blood-lust of a Marie de Medicis. Abominable woman, scourge of France, thou wast the chief instigator of the plot." Henceforth the desire of bringing the Queen to trial and of dragging her to a bloody death was openly discussed in the journals of the day and in all places of public resort; and she had no comfort, no protection from any of those immediately around her. Louis, indeed, seemed to be in a state of stupor. For ten days he scarcely spoke a single word; his wife's tears and prayers to him to rouse himself, if only for the sake of his children, finally prevailed in some slight degree to dispel his apathy of despair.

Marie Antoinette herself, when the first effects of the bitter disappointment had passed off, was stronger, more active, more courageous than ever before. She had now secured an unexpected ally in the person of Barnave. For several months, with his powerful assistance, she struggled bravely and cleverly against relentless Fate, and it almost seemed for a time that she might win in the odds against her. This period of her existence, though it is far from being the most brilliant, is assuredly the most beautiful, the most praiseworthy in the chequered career of Marie Antoinette.

CHAPTER IX

THE STRUGGLE

Five days after the return from Varennes on June 29th 1791 the Queen wrote to Fersen: "I am alive! Do not write—that would betray us, and above all do not come back on any pretext whatever. . . . We are watched day and night; I do not care. Do not distress yourself; I shall come to no harm. The Assembly will deal gently with us. I shall not be able to write again. Adieu." This hurried, disjointed note defines the situation of the fugitives fairly accurately. Their lives are safe, indeed, but this is all—they are spared no trial, no humiliation. All pretence is over. The palace of the Tuileries is to all intents and purposes a prison: all doors are locked, guards are posted at all entrances, sentinels are stationed before the Queen's apartments, and an aide-de-camp of Lafayette spends the night behind a screen in her sleeping-room and may at any moment assure himself that she is safely in bed. And, in spite of all these precautions, Lafayette is so uneasy that he actually has the chimney examined to make sure that Marie Antoinette cannot escape by the roof. When the Queen visits Louis or her children she is accompanied by an officer who opens and closes the doors without losing sight of her for one moment. All letters are opened. Any rare visits from the outer world are subjected to formalities so complicated as to be ridiculous. One of the Queen's ladies, the Princesse de Tarente, on asking for an interview, is stopped so many times and has to answer so many questions

that it is several hours before she is finally announced. A little later on, however, these truly absurd precautions are discarded for passports signed by Lafayette himself and very rarely granted to anyone.

In spite of her apparent resignation, Marie Antoinette became indignant at this perpetual oppression, and she determined to show that she looked on herself as a prisoner. When on June 26th the deputies arrived to ask questions as to the Varennes episode, she silently and with icy dignity waved them to armchairs, while she herself sat on a low stool. She declined to expose herself to the public gaze, and refused to leave her apartments, where she stayed all day, not even going down to the Dauphin's little garden. Her most bitter privation, however, was the loss of those friends who formerly had consoled her in her distress. "My heart is broken," was her sad message to Esterhazy; "I have no friend to whom I can tell my sorrows, and yet I ought to be thankful that they are safe and far away. I have no news; I only know of what is going on from the papers or by listening to the various reports of all these different excited individuals. It is an unbearable state of things." Meanwhile, the quarrel with the emigrant party was every day becoming more acute. The Varennes fiasco had had the effect that misfortune generally produces. It had embittered and increased the general discontent. Calonne, the agent of the Comte d'Artois, blamed Breteuil, Marie Antoinette's agent, and everyone at Coblentz accused him of having ruined the undertaking. Vaudreuil's letters are full of invective against this faithful servant of the Crown. "A man," he writes, "who has deceived and insulted the Comte d'Artois —an individual who is in evil repute amongst those of the nobility who are united beneath the banner of Princes!" His language becomes stronger and stronger, and he finally declares that "If this insolent

traitor does not die by the hand of the public executioner he must be flogged to death!"

The arrival of the Comte de Provence, who, more fortunate than his brother, had made good his escape and had crossed the frontier, furnished a leader to the exiles of Coblentz. The idea of a regency began to loom more and more distinctly before their already over-excited imaginations, and to the advantage of having a regent of their own choosing would be added what for many of them would be the additional gratification—the undoing of Marie Antoinette. This was not a new idea. As long since as 1787, in the salon of Mme de Balbi, mistress of the Comte de Provence, some one having observed that in the event of the death of Louis XVI, his wife would assume power, "If that were to happen," said La Châtre, Monsieur's grand chamberlain, "I would take upon myself to escort the Austrian home with fifty dragoons of my regiment." "And I, La Châtre,' rejoined Larneth, "I know some one who with fifty cavaliers of *his* regiment would prevent you from doing so." Now the dispute was revived with greater bitterness and the sound of it reached the Tuileries, there to echo mournfully in the ears of the royal prisoners. The Queen was deeply offended. In her domestic circle she constantly poured forth complaints and reproaches against the emigrés, their pretensions, and their boastings. "They imagine that they are heroes," she declared contemptuously. "Fine heroes indeed, even with their King of Sweden to help them!" And another day she wrote: "If my brothers-in-law did indeed manage to assist us, we should have to pay dearly for their help; we should have *them* as masters and they would be more trying and more intolerable than any of the others." She also wrote as follows to Mercy: "You well know yourself the evil desires and wicked intentions of the emigrés. The cowards, to abandon

us and now to wish us to expose ourselves merely to serve their ends!" There was, moreover, diversity of opinion in the Royal family at the Tuileries, for Madame Elizabeth, the King's sister, was to a certain extent under the influence of her other brothers at Coblentz. There were accordingly a good many arguments and disputes, of which Marie Antoinette complained to Fersen: "It is a perfect Hell here! With the best intentions in the world I am forced to remain silent. My sister is so indiscreet that, surrounded by intriguers as she is and moreover so swayed by her brothers at Coblentz, it is impossible to talk on any subject without quarelling all the time!"

It is necessary to draw attention to the Queen's state of mind in order to appreciate the innumerable difficulties of the situation during which the supreme struggle which she undertook—in the attempt to save the Crown and also, as Mirabeau had predicted, to save the lives of herself and her family—was finally engaged in.

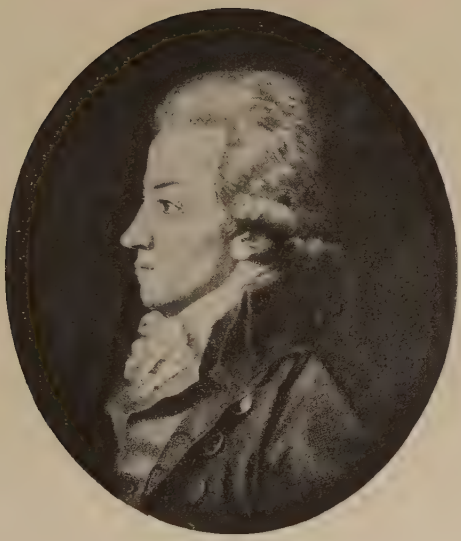
A few weeks after the Varennes disaster Madame Campan, on arriving in Paris, proceeded at once to the Tuileries to resume her duties near Marie Antoinette. "The Queen," she writes, "took me into her cabinet and told me that she would have great need of me in a communication which she had established with Barnave, Duport, and Alexandre Lameth . . . *Barnave*," she added, "*is a man worthy of esteem.* I was astonished to hear Barnave's name spoken with such good will. When I quitted Paris a great number of persons spoke of him only with horror; I said as much to her and she was not surprised but said that he was much changed. . . *If ever we get the power into our hands again*," went on the Queen, "*Barnave's pardon is beforehand written in our hearts.* The Queen," continues Madame Campan, "astonished me more and more by the warmth with which

she justified the favourable opinion she had formed of Barnave."

The Queen's association with the fiery leader of the Revolution was for long established by this single witness alone; however, recently a valuable discovery has thrown a vivid light upon this most important episode in Marie Antoinette's career—her letters to Barnave and his replies have been brought to light, and there is no doubt whatever as to their authenticity. The first one consists of this note in Marie Antoinette's own handwriting, which explains the drift of the whole correspondence: "Having well reflected since my return, upon the strength, the abilities, and the mind of him with whom I have talked lately a great deal, I have come to the conclusion that it would be advisable to establish a kind of correspondence with him, reserving to myself however as a primary condition that I shall always say frankly exactly what I think, that I shall praise where I consider praise is due, and likewise blame when I consider blame to be necessary. These conditions have been accepted and now our correspondence is about to begin." There are quite a number of letters which must be carefully considered to enable us to judge of the political views and actions of the Queen during this supreme crisis. In these letters a new woman appears, a woman of a firm disposition and clear judgment, who bravely overcomes her prejudices and sacrifices without scruple her most cherished beliefs to the pressing necessities of the moment, a woman, moreover, who has a very clear notion of what might possibly save the ancient dynasty from complete wreck. If the attempt failed, if the fury of the tempest overcame the valiant pilot, at least the fact of having fought to the very last redounds to the eternal honour of Marie Antoinette.

The sympathy between the Queen and Barnave originated in tragic circumstances at a time when

the minds of both were so disturbed as to render the maintaining of decorous reserve difficult, nay almost impossible. Pétion, young Latour-Maubourg, and Barnave himself were the three Commissioners who had been charged with the duty of bringing back to Paris the Royal fugitives who had been stopped at Varennes. They met the returning cavalcade at Épernay—Latour-Maubourg climbed on to the box of the coach, the two others took their places inside it, and thus on a day of suffocating heat eight persons were crammed into the cumbersome vehicle. Pétion, sitting between the King and Queen with his face to the horses, behaved in an offensive manner and talked far too much; Barnave who sat opposite to the Queen was, on the contrary, very quiet and silent, and at last Marie Antoinette said to Pétion, half impatiently: "Tell your friend not to look out of the window when I speak to him." Little by little the ice melted. Barnave took courage to look at the Queen. She was holding her boy in her arms; her tender love and care for the child touched the Tribune's far from stony heart; and presently he actually ventured to stroke the Dauphin's long golden curls. At first he had merely pitied the Mother, but soon he began also to admire the woman, and his eyes betrayed his feelings. Glances were exchanged between the Queen and himself and constituted a preliminary treaty—words did the rest. At each relay and at the inns where they rested, they talked; the Queen gave her impressions, Barnave said what he thought; and on both sides prejudices melted away to be replaced by trust and confidence. Those two days left a deep impression on Barnave's heart, as is evident in the following lines, in which he calls to mind this outstanding event in his life: "An incident fixed for ever in my memory, which has given occasion for so many foul calumnies, but which, by impressing on my mind this striking



A. P. J. M. BARNAVE

[*face p. 244*

example of misfortune, has doubtless helped me to bear my own misfortunes more easily."

He had been born at Grenoble in 1761 of a Protestant family; his father was a clever lawyer, and his mother, whose maiden name was de Presles, was an exceedingly brilliant woman. At the time of the Varennes disaster Antoine Barnave was just thirty years old. Of medium height, with a good figure, he had a long oval face and a large thick-lipped mouth. His expression was pleasant, and he had an agreeable slightly husky voice. Under a cold exterior he hid an ardent soul. "He was consumed by an inward fire" was said of him at the time. He had a wonderful memory, in which everything he desired to remember was tabulated in order. A good extempore speaker, he did not aim at effect: he was always more anxious to convince his audience than to shine as an orator, and he generally succeeded in making his points because he was so sure of himself. He almost always came off victor in the oratorical tussles which he held with Mirabeau owing to his powers of persuasion. His views were in reality very moderate and he disliked all kinds of excesses, but at the beginning of the Revolution he had, energetic as he was, allowed himself to be drawn into taking an active part in what was going on. One day, after the fall of the Bastille and the murders of Foulon and Berthier, his excitement carried him away, and he uttered words which were not in reality an expression of his true opinions: "*Le sang qui a coulé est-il donc si pur?*" he exclaimed in the tribune of the Assembly, and these words after more than a century weigh heavily against his name.

Yet, throughout all the violent measures which he eloquently defended, he, personally, continued to be gentle and decorous in manner. He was a well-bred man, fond of good company, and courteous to his

adversaries. After a tremendous duel with his colleague Cazalès, the determined royalist, the two combatants had made friends and were now often together. Barnave frequently visited the salons of the great ladies who were inclined to liberal ideas, such as the Duchesse d'Enville, Madame de Tessé (who nicknamed him Néronet), the Princesse de Broglie, and Madame de la Châtre, who called him "their little wild man." He was said to be in love with Pauline de Montmorin, Chateaubriand's Pauline. When Mirabeau was making terms with the Court, he had mentioned Barnave as one of the men who could and who ought to be won over to moderate notions. Barnave himself was beginning to grow weary of the odious violence and the eccentricities of the Jacobins. Shortly before the Varennes episode in talking one day to Malouet, he had observed: "I have grown much older during the last few months." Marie Antoinette completed his conversion. At the end of the mournful journey, when Paris was reached at last, the Queen had conquered Barnave as she had formerly conquered Mirabeau, only, as Lamartine remarks: "Mirabeau sold himself and Barnave gave himself."

It was, as we have seen, the Queen who took the initiative in the correspondence. For this first step she made use of an intermediary, who appears to have been the Chevalier de Jarjayes, one of her most faithful and most devoted followers, to whom she wrote the following letter, which is in many respects a remarkable one and of which we quote the more essential passages: "I wish you to do your best to see Monsieur Barnave, and to tell him that, impressed by his character and by the frankness and sincerity which he evinced during the two days which we spent together, I am most anxious to know his opinion as to what we should attempt at the present juncture.

You will explain to him the extreme difficulty that I have in communicating with anyone at all. . . . He may count absolutely on my discretion and also on my will, which, for the welfare of the majority, will always be ready to bow to what is strictly necessary." The Queen then proceeds to enter into the gist of the matter: "We cannot go on as we are; we must do something—but what? I do not know. And I ask him to tell me. He must, during our conversation, have perceived that I am quite sincere; and sincere I shall always be: this is the one comfort that I still retain which can never be taken from me. I believe that he means well; *we* certainly mean well and, whatever may be said against us, we always *have had* good intentions. If he can only arrange that we may act altogether, if he can find some way of letting me know his opinions, I will tell him quite frankly of anything that I may be able to accomplish. I would risk anything for the public welfare." The letter ends with these touching words: "I trust absolutely to the zeal, the good-will, and the sagacity of Monsieur Barnave, not for us, but for the State and the general public, which indeed are so bound up in the persons of the King and his Son that they form one whole. Thus it is to the man who most loves the people and the nation, and who I believe to be more capable than any other, that I appeal to save each and all; for indeed King and State cannot be divided."

A second note from Marie Antoinette tells how Barnave received her proposal. He unhesitatingly accepted the rôle she offered him; he asked only permission to annex two others who together with him would revise any measures that might be sent to the Queen for her consideration. He named Alexander Lameth and Duport du Dutertre, both Jacobins who had left the Club and who were now leaders in the left wing of the Constitutional party

in the Assembly. They both had formerly been as fanatical as Barnave himself, indeed Duport, who in the preceding year had been a member of Montmorin's cabinet, had one day remarked coldly that, though he did not desire the Queen's death, he would "not oppose a measure to bring her to trial." However, the two men were by now much softened and disabused of violent prejudices and they declared themselves willing to assist Barnave in his generous enterprise. Thus the long political letters which were sent to the Queen were generally composed by this trio; but it is Barnave himself who was the leading spirit in the affair: it was he who gave the necessary impetus, who wielded the pen. He it was to whom the Queen appealed at difficult moments; he, when there were divergences of opinion—and they were frequent—undertook negotiations and patched up the half-destroyed pact once again. He it was who in the end expiated on the scaffold the crime of having responded to Marie Antoinette's appeal for help; Barnave's alliance with the Queen was to be cemented with his life-blood.

A serious question here inevitably arises—and it is both a difficult and a distressing question. How much real sincerity did Marie Antoinette put into the desperate struggle? There are curious contradictions in various passages of her letters to her own intimate friends. She speaks admiringly of the good-will of those whom she calls her "new acquaintances." In relating the circumstances to Fersen she remarks: "I am treasuring against the happy hour when we shall see each other once more a whole volume of strange correspondence, the more strange in that one is forced to believe in those who have taken part in it. No one in the world knows of it with any certainty; if it has been talked of at all, it has been in such a vague manner as to make it merely one of the thousand

absurd things that are discussed every day." She writes in much the same strain to Mercy: "I am fairly satisfied with them, that is to say with Duport, Lameth, and Barnave. At this very moment I am keeping up a correspondence with the two last-named of which no single person has any notion, not even their own friends. One is constrained to respect them. Though they keep to their opinions, I have invariably found them perfectly sincere, and they are strong and sagacious and truly anxious to restore order, which would naturally entail the restoration of the Royal authority."

That the Queen should be sometimes impatient of the concessions that are forced upon her, of the requests that are made to her, is most natural and excusable. She incurs no blame when she exclaims despairingly; "You do not know how I suffer in doing all that I am forced to do." One can sympathise with her when she writes to Mercy: "However well-intentioned they may be, their notions are absurd and will never do for us." But in her letters to Fersen Marie Antoinette strikes a different note. She infers to her friend that, in having recourse to these men whom Fersen curtly designates as "savages," she is merely, so to say, lulling them to sleep, and is making use of them without giving herself into their hands—that, in short, she is only acting a part, of which she is often mortally weary. "Do you at all understand my position?" she exclaims, "and the game I am forced to play all day and every day? Sometimes I really do not understand myself, and I am obliged to pause and wonder if it is really I who am speaking. . . . But what else can I do? It is all necessary; I do assure you that we should be much worse off even than we are if I did not do as I am doing. At least we are gaining time, and that is essential." The letter finishes with words that one would rather not read:

"What joy if one day I am again powerful enough to show all these fools that I was never really their dupe!"

This appearance of double-dealing is, however, easily explained by reading the letters of those to whom the Queen is using such forcible language. All her friends, Mercy and Fersen in particular, are horrified and amazed at seeing Marie Antoinette, according to their expression, "taking part in the Revolution." They declare that she is making terms with her enemies, and they pour forth reproaches, complaints, and sarcastic remarks. For them, Barnave and his followers were and are "revolutionaries," "dangerous wretches," "wily rogues" (such are the epithets bestowed on Marie Antoinette's allies), who are only out to deceive her and to obtain her whole confidence in order that they may the more easily destroy her. "Never, never," declares Fersen, "will you succeed in converting the Jacobins! Too well they know the evil they have done not to dread vengeance. They will make the nation lose every vestige of respect for you. The nobility, forsaken by you, will feel that it no longer owes you anything. You will lower yourself in the sight of the European Powers, and you will be accused of cowardice. Do not allow yourself to be influenced by these savages. They are wretches, who will never do anything for you." Mercy, in much more temperate language, expresses precisely the same sentiments.

The Queen is naturally much troubled by these warnings sent her by her dearest friends. She hesitates frequently, fears that traps are being laid for her, cannot decide whether to trust her old friends or these new advisers. When she is reading Barnave's notes, and more especially when she is conversing with him, she cannot resist hoping that she will be helped, seconded, and saved by his efforts on her behalf. Then, when Mercy utters his warnings, she begins to doubt once

more, and to calm the fears of her old Mentor, she assures him that she is by no means giving herself away, that she is merely *using* these people, not confiding in them. With Fersen she goes even farther. In his anger, in the excessively strong language which he employs whenever he mentions Barnave's name, a stronger feeling than could possibly have been occasioned by a mere divergence in political ideas is plainly perceptible. Fersen feels a kind of personal hostility—the jealousy of a lover towards this young distinguished, attractive man whose influence over the Queen is exasperating. He so intensely dislikes this supposed rival that he goes so far as to wish for his death. When in the following year he hears that Barnave has been arrested, he exclaims: "I only hope that he will be executed. No one deserves death more!" Marie Antoinette, quick-witted as she is, very soon perceives and understands Fersen's state of mind, and she proceeds at once to do her very best to allay his unjust suspicions. What at first glance appears to be deliberate deceit is but the loving anxiety of an affectionate and tender heart seeking to reassure the absent friend to whom alone that heart entirely belongs.

As a matter of fact, Marie Antoinette is betraying no one. Her letters to Barnave furnish ample proof of this fact. She discusses matters with him, raises objections to his proposals, sometimes refuses to yield her point, and whenever she does agree to act as he desires she most loyally keeps her promises, and her actions exactly follow out his suggestions. If events had but proved favourable, if success had but rewarded these gallant endeavours, it is very certain that the Queen and her chosen allies would have succeeded in installing a liberal government and would have bestowed upon the nation a constitutional monarchy which would have secured peace and rest to France.

The many questions involved during this correspondence are too complex, too numerous to be critically considered in these pages; all who desire to know the details will find them portrayed in Monsieur de Heidenstam's interesting volume. Three important political questions must, however, be briefly mentioned—the attitude of Austria, the behaviour of the emigrés, and, most important of all, the acceptance of the Constitution.

To bind Austria to France and to obtain from the Emperor a confirmation of such an alliance as would prevent his joining the emigrés or allying himself with European powers, such as Sweden, Prussia and Russia, all apparently anxious to interfere in French affairs—such was the first political effort which Marie Antoinette was invited to try her hand upon. She did not decline the task, but she held out small hope of any success. "Regarding the Emperor," she wrote to her advisers, "I stand thus: we have been separated for twenty-six years; during all this time we have never held anything beyond a purely superficial correspondence with each other. During the last fifteen months he has seemed to be more kindly disposed towards me, but circumstances have prevented any regular exchange of letters; therefore I have no influence whatever with him in political affairs. However, I do not refuse to write if it is generally thought that such a step would be of use." Eventually she did write to the Emperor on lines dictated to her by her three advisers. The letter has, unfortunately, been lost; after about a month, an ambiguous, reticent reply was received from Leopold, which practically heralded the declaration to be drawn up at Pillnitz a few weeks later. This declaration in itself was pacific enough, but the little court at Coblentz, by receiving it with excited manifestations of feeling, made it appear to be threatening and a menace. When

the Queen read at the foot of the declaration the two signatures of the Comtes de Provence and d'Artois, she uttered but one significant word: "Cain!" The negotiations with the emigrés met with no better success. The matter was one which Barnave and his friends perpetually harped upon. They considered that the prolonged absence of the King's brothers and of the friends of the Queen as well as of a great number of the nobility of France contributed greatly to the prevailing unrest in the country and increased the nation's distrust of Louis and his Consort. If only the Queen could contrive to recall, if not all the voluntary exiles, at any rate the Princes of the Blood, she would, indeed, be rendering signal service to the Monarchy. The Queen fully agreed, and in what she said she was absolutely sincere: "The return of Monsieur," she wrote to Barnave, "is as necessary for our personal safety as for the safe-guarding of the Monarchy." And in many other letters she inveighed against the deadly injury inflicted on the Crown by those who went abroad with their prejudices, their bitter resentments, their plots, and their thirst for revenge. What she said to Barnave she repeated to Fersen: "I know perfectly," she told him, "that once gone and in such a manner, it is impossible for them to come back; but it is a great misfortune and an even greater misfortune for France as a whole than for Paris, for the provinces are left entirely to themselves or given over to a horde of wretches or madmen." Marie Antoinette, however, had no illusions as to any personal influence of hers with the Princes or their partisans. Too well she knew the prejudices of her brothers-in-law, and she knew, too, that any advance on her part would do more harm than good. "We ought," she said, "to try to find some way of acting without my personally appearing in the matter at all."

However, in the end she yields to the entreaties

of Barnave and his two friends and she makes several attempts to touch the hearts of the emigrés. She writes with her own hand a most pressing letter to Monsieur, and she induces the King to write as well. She sends a special messenger, the Baron de Goguelat, bearing very peremptory injunctions, to Coblentz. But nothing is of any use. To Louis, who implores them to obey his commands, his two brothers make the following insolent response: "If we are being addressed by these people (meaning the Constitutional party) we will listen to nothing; if on the other hand, you are addressing us, we will listen, but we will go our own way." When the Queen hears what has transpired she writes sadly: "I warned M. Barnave that the Princes and the other emigrés would not obey. It was certain to be so. I feel that I need not reproach myself for I have tried everything possible to induce them to return." Marie Antoinette's interference, as a matter of fact, only makes the Coblentz clique more aggressive than ever. They now declare that the personal safety of the King and Queen is of less consequence than that of Royalty as a whole, and by this they mean the restoration of all the ancient usages and privileges. This is what Gustavus III, King of Sweden, refers to when he writes to his Ambassador that it matters little whether Louis XVI, Louis XVIII, or Charles X be seated on the French Throne if only the monster can be crushed and vanquished.

With great injustice Marie Antoinette's new advisers blame her for the non-success of the enterprise, and accuse her if not precisely of being in league with the emigrés at least of acting towards them with a calculated indulgence; the deputies even spoke of ceasing to act in concert with her. The Queen's reply to this attack is both affecting and sagacious: "When I began my correspondence with these gentlemen I was

determined to be perfectly straightforward. This I always am, because I am by nature truthful. I thought by drawing near to three men who appeared to be frank and truthful likewise that we might possibly by acting together effect some good. I sacrificed all my own wishes in the hope of benefiting the King and his people. No regret did I feel, no backward glance did I cast: I beheld my duty, and that was enough for me." A few days later she continues as follows: "I have never refused or feared to hear the truth; indeed I have ever been grateful to those who sought to make it known to me. But when after a plan resolved upon by mutual consent, an undertaking faithfully followed by me on my part for four months, these gentlemen come and say to me without any apparent reason, without my having, even once, refused to follow their advice, that they prefer to separate themselves from me and mine and tell me that it is useless for them to continue this correspondence, I freely confess that I cannot perceive in this action of theirs that generosity which it formerly gave me pleasure to see in them nor moreover that desire to work for the public good which I felt sure that they possessed." The Queen's fine bold spirit makes an impression. Barnave talks the deputies over, and the treaty is not abandoned.

The only important result, and it is a really important one of the united efforts of the Queen and the three deputies, was the acceptance of the Constitution by the King. During the sitting of September the third, 1791, the Assembly had approved of the scheme as a whole and now all that was required was the Royal sanction. It was far from being a perfect achievement: it had been hastily undertaken during the struggle of parties and the thunder of insurrection; its many errors were very apparent from the very first. Bad as it was, however, it was modelled in many respects

upon the English Constitutional plan, and it left at least the appearance of authority to Louis and restored to him his Throne. Had it but been vigorously and sagaciously followed out it might possibly have provided the King with sufficient support to enable him to hold his own against the demagogues—at least so Barnave and his friends told the Queen. "This Constitution is essentially Monarchical," they declared. "Details which are lacking in the proposed government system can be added by legislature; the Constitution provides for this. . . . Ultimately no Prince in Europe will be so firmly established on his throne as is the King of France, that is to say when public opinion does as much for him as the Constitution." They assured her, moreover, that, the Constitution once accepted, an era of peace, of calm, of national prosperity for France would most certainly ensue. The Queen was not so hopeful. "These gentlemen declare," she replied, "that the Constitution is *essentially Monarchical.* I confess that I should like information on this head. I want to know *why* they think thus." And another aspect of the affair troubled her. If the present Assembly had arranged matters so far, might not the next Assembly undo all that had been done? "Decidedly," wrote the Queen, "there are palpable advantages for the King and the Monarchy in the Constitution, as it is conceived by these gentlemen. . . . But who is willing to answer for the next legislature? Who can say whether, in spite of decrees and oaths, the members may not change everything?' However, notwithstanding these most reasonable objections, she was prevailed upon finally to use her influence in getting the King to accept the Constitution. To outside friends, to Mercy, to Fersen, to others who preached refusal and obstinate resistance, she replied: "They tell us and the King's brothers declare every day that we must decline everything, and that we shall be

upheld. By whom? . . . It is impossible under present circumstances for the King to refuse to accept. Believe me, what I am telling you is only too true. You know me well enough to be aware that I would much prefer to act in a noble and courageous fashion, but there is no courage in running the risk of certain danger." And she haughtily declined any extraneous help from any foreign power at this particular juncture. "Regarding the laws of a country," she remarked, "each country has a perfect right to choose the laws that it prefers."

She is equally sagacious when minor details come under discussion. Her advisers had sent for her approval a discourse which they had drawn up as suitable for the King to pronounce at the Assembly. It was long and emphatic, and the Queen would have none of it. "I feel," she said, "that the King's speech should be short and dignified: it appears to me that as little as possible should be said." Barnave was anxious that she should herself write to the Assembly saying that she would adhere to the Constitutional decree. This the Queen absolutely declined to do: "Why should I write to the Assembly? I have given sufficient proof on countless occasions that the King's decisions are also mine. I have no need to publicly announce this fact. It seems to me also (and I am far from complaining of this) that the Assembly has consistently ignored me; it would be therefore unwise and tactless on my part to put myself forward. . . . I will write nothing, but, if at any time I am required to testify to the perfect agreement of my sentiments with those of the King, I will eagerly do so. All my interests are bound up in him and in his son. I will ever act with them and for them. Without them I am of no importance at all."

It looked at first as though the hopes of Barnave and his friends were to be justified. The King's

little speech was joyously acclaimed in the Assembly and the public proclamation of the Constitution in the Champs de Mars was received with such thunderous applause that the Queen on returning to the Tuileries said to the King in amazement: "They do not seem to be the same people!" When the Queen and her children appeared at the Theatre Italien they were received with transports of joy. The Throne seemed to have regained something of its ancient prestige and splendour, and the Sovereign and his Consort were allowed at least a semblance of liberty. "We are enjoying a kind of freedom," wrote the Queen: "at least the doors of our rooms are no longer kept open and everyone is allowed to enter the palace and the gardens." A very relative freedom and a very insecure safety as the Queen well knew, for her letter ends on this melancholy note: "There is no need to fear for our persons, we are very valuable hostages. . . ."

Meanwhile at Coblentz indignation was rife against what was called the "cowardice of the Queen," and everyone blamed her "disgraceful conduct," as the King of Sweden was pleased to designate her line of action. She was nicknamed a democrat and Louis was called a fool. The newspaper-reports of the King's speech in the Assembly were received and read with fury. Someone said in the presence of the Comte d'Artois that Marie Antoinette had been vociferously acclaimed at the Theatre Italien. "Ah," said the Prince in a bitterly ironical tone of voice, "she must have been delighted at the chance of showing off her beautiful arms!" One of the emigrés, the Comtesse de Bombelles, wrote to a friend about this time. "How can the Queen confide at all in M. the Comte d'Artois?—she must know of all the infamous things that he and his following have said and are saying about her and the King." Marie Antoinette was perfectly aware of what was going on at Coblentz

and her indignation is very perceptible in the following note to Esterhazy: "I hope that, in spite of all that is said against me, you know me sufficiently well to believe in my strength of character and in my courage which will never falter. That my *friends* should think well of me is most necessary to my peace of mind. I despise the rest of mankind too much ever to think of them at all."

Alas, for the Queen's courage! The moment was approaching fast in which she would need all the courage she possessed. The Constitutional Assembly's career was over, and the Legislative Assembly which now replaced it merited to the full Marie Antoinette's severe condemnation. "There is nothing to be done with this Assembly," she wrote to Fersen. "It is a horde of wretches, of madmen, and of fools. The few who try to keep order and who are a little less evil than the others are not listened to, do not dare to speak in fact." Barnave and his friends were not members of this Assembly. But they continued to give the Queen advice, and the correspondence was still carried on.

It was at this period that secret interviews began between Barnave and Marie Antoinette. Almost at the outset of the correspondence the Queen had expressed a desire to treat orally with her advisers. "A thousand things can be spoken," she said. "A thousand things can be explained that it would be impossible to write. . . . I think I might be useful in discussing those matters which not by my wisdom —for I am very far from having any—but by my experience, in having for seventeen years seen and observed so much, I know a good deal about."

As long as she was practically a prisoner it was impossible to comply with her desire; but as soon as she was permitted a certain amount of freedom the subject was discussed once more. The first time Barnave betook himself to the Tuileries and was about

to enter the Palace by a little side door at which Madame Campan was awaiting him he became aware that he was being watched, and walked away accordingly without attempting to see the Queen. The next attempt was more fortunate and he actually afterwards contrived to see the Queen several times and held various confidential discussions with her, to which discussions certain passages of the correspondence refer. On December 28th, 1791, the Queen writes: "I know that M. Barnave is leaving soon and I know what pressing reasons have caused him to decide on this step. I am sure that he will not forget the concluding portion of our conversation."

His reasons *we* know, too; and they were political reasons. The new Assembly was already doing its worst. Decrees were being enacted threatening with death all emigrés who had not returned by January the first and inflicting cruel punishments on all priests who declined to submit to the Civil Constitution. To these decrees the King of course opposed his Veto, and the struggle was at once entered on with extraordinary violence. The European powers, with Austria at their head, threatened war on France. Excitement was general; dreams of peace vanished into thin air. Barnave was suspected by the Jacobins, and he was also detested by the emigrés; he knew he was powerless and that one only chance of safety remained to him; he saw that he must return to his native province; there, if possible regain his popularity and perhaps be re-elected for the next Assembly. He decided therefore to go and live at Grenoble.

Madame Campan relates his farewell to the Queen: "I am sure to lose my head," he said, "for interesting myself in your misfortunes and for the services which I have sought to render you. I request for my sole reward the honour of kissing your hand." The

Queen, her eyes suffused with tears, granted him this favour. They were never to meet again.

The Queen was faithful to her promises, and gave into Fersen's safekeeping all letters and papers which could in any way compromise her friend. Louis, unfortunately, overlooked in one of his writing-table drawers a note which revealed the dangerous secret. After the 10th of August this note was found, and Barnave was consequently arrested at Grenoble. He languished there for more than ten months in prison, and then was brought to Paris in a wretched cart, which his mother and sister followed on foot, weeping. He appeared before the tribunal on November 28th, 1793, and his head fell under the axe of the guillotine on the day following. On the eve of his execution he wrote to his sister: "I was gifted with a vivid imagination and for long I saw visions and dreamed dreams. Now I see more clearly, and in dying the only things that I regret are the ties of friendship." Perhaps in writing these lines his thoughts turned to the touching and elevating emotions which the journey in the coach returning from Varennes had awakened in his heart; perhaps he was thinking of that long fight which the Queen and he had so bravely fought together, the remembrance of which honours his name and his memory.

In February 1792, a few weeks after Barnave's departure, Fersen, who had been in Brussels, came to Paris by night under a false name, making use of a forged passport and wearing a huge wig by way of disguise. On the 13th of the month he contrived to slip unnoticed into the Tuileries and saw the Queen for a few moments. Next day, towards evening, he was again received by her, and this time the King was present at the interview. Once more on the 21st of the month he returned to the Palace for the third time, and had both tea and supper with Louis and

Marie Antoinette. At midnight he took his leave, got into his travelling-coach, and posted back to Brussels, bearing with him many secret instructions. It was his last visit to Marie Antoinette.

Fersen had gone to France with the express hope and desire of inducing the Royal captives to attempt once more to fly from Paris. He met with a determined refusal. "Saw the King at six o'clock this evening," he notes in his Journal. "He will not leave, and it would be difficult to do so—he is so closely guarded. But the fact is that he has scruples about trying to escape, for he has so often promised to remain and he is such an honourable man."

Fersen in his interviews with the Queen had found her to be tired, depressed, and exasperated. She told him that she still occasionally saw Barnave's two friends, Lameth and Duport du Dutertre, and that they assured her continually "that now the only hope remaining lay in calling in foreign troops, otherwise all would be lost." They moreover affirmed that the greater number of the King's ministers were secretly betraying him. She had given up all hope of gaining anything by conciliation. "She seems," wrote Fersen, "to be resolved to bear *anything* rather than go on as she is doing at present." She repeated to him the words that she had used in speaking to Simolin, the old Russian Minister who had delivered to her a message from his Emperor. "Say to the Emperor that the nation has too great need of the King and his son to do them any harm. As or myself, I would rather run any and all risks than continue to exist longer under these wretched, miserable conditions."

The Queen's state of mind is vividly portrayed in letters written by her during this period. She is crushed by the heavy burden which has weighed for so long upon her shoulders. "I have not a single moment to myself," she writes, "between the people

whom I have to see, the writing I have to get through, and the time I devote to my children." And there is no one to help her, and there are dangers and difficulties everywhere. "Even amongst ourselves there are many obstacles to encounter and hard battles to fight. . . . I foresee dire misfortune in the apathy of some persons, and the evil intentions of others." Occasionally in the letters a passionate outburst of wounded pride occurs. "My God, can it be that I, born with strength of will and fully conscious of the blood which flows in my veins, should be fated to pass my life in such times and with such men! But do not fear that my courage will ever leave me. Not for my own benefit but for the sake of my son I take care of myself, and to the very last I will fulfil all the duties imposed on me in the course of my long, wearisome journey." In writing these last words, it is evident that her tears suddenly blind her, for the lines are blotted and she ends abruptly. "I see no longer what I am writing. Adieu!"

Fersen departed full of fears for the life of the King and his Consort. "The demagogues make no secret of their intentions," he wrote to his sister, "and the Palace may be invaded at any moment. Their Majesties can no longer go out, nor even sleep both at the same time. They rest alternately: one is always awake in case their apartments are forced by the monsters who surround them." And this was no exaggeration. Ominous threats resounded with each new day. Pikes were brandished and the horrible use to which they were to be put was loudly proclaimed. Red caps were waved beneath the windows of the Tuileries. Condorcet, one evening at supper, suggested shutting up Marie Antoinette in a convent, and he added that he would take the Dauphin from his mother and look after his education himself, while Vergniaud, speaking at the tribune of the Assembly, declared that the person of the King, only, was sacred,

and that no other head save his, however exalted, ought to escape the sword of justice.

These undisguised threats, this visible danger of death forced Marie Antoinette at last to claim assistance from foreign powers. As has been truly remarked: "It was not the Queen who acted thus, but the mother, the wife, who, driven to desperation, sought help for her dear ones." Until this moment she had, as we have seen, consistently opposed the policy of the emigrés and any idea of a foreign invasion. "The Queen of France," Gustavus III had remarked bitterly, "writes letter after letter to the Emperor to dissuade him from taking action . . . she prefers the humiliation and the dangers of her present situation to any dependence on the Princes her brothers, whom she appears to dread." Up till now the most that she had contemplated or desired was what she termed an "armed Congress," a gathering of ambassadors on the frontiers of the Kingdom, at Aix-la-Chapelle, for example, backed by a body of troops capable of adding weight to their deliberations. Such a Congress would solemnly swear not to interfere in any way with the interior affairs of France; it would merely demand that the King should be set at liberty. Then Louis, free once more, would play a mediator's part between his people and the foreign powers who had come to his aid, and together with the Assembly he would inaugurate Constitutional Reforms and wise and liberal laws.

Now, however, beneath the lash of adversity the Queen's scruples were vanishing and she began to advocate more direct action, more active interference. She had imparted her views on the situation to Fersen and had entrusted him with a secret mission, which he faithfully fulfilled. Alas! almost simultaneously two totally unexpected tragic events rendered all his efforts useless. Within fifteen days of each other

Leopold II died quite suddenly and Gustavus III fell by the hand of an assassin.

At this critical moment the nation gave way to a burst of patriotic rage, exasperated as it was by the threats of the emigrés at Coblentz, and the coalition of the powers and the Assembly declared war on Austria. "So much the better!" the Queen is said to have exclaimed when she heard the news. The Prince de Condé writing to his son tells, however, quite a different tale. "The Queen," he says, "is more angry with us than ever. She declares that our political views have overborne hers with the foreign powers, and that it is we who have declared war. There is a certain amount of truth in this, and she will never forgive us."

It is certain, in any case, that Marie Antoinette did all she could to prevent the Princes' army from taking any active share in the struggle. She dreaded with reason to see, if their army did advance, a war that was between the powers only take on the appearance of civil war and become to all intents and purposes an attack on the now definitely established Revolution. Mallet du Pan was therefore sent post-haste to Coblentz bearing the King's commands, but he was set on one side and disregarded, and Condé almost immediately advanced at the head of his troops. All was now irretrievably lost. The authors of the Revolution and the active instigators of the mob had their text ready to hand at last, and they made good use of it. "The French troops," they alleged, "are fighting against the Queen's nephew, and the King's nearest relatives are in the enemy's ranks. How is it possible to doubt the treason of the Court? Who does not clearly perceive that Marie Antoinette aspires to bathe in the blood of good patriots?" The first skirmishes at the front added to the general excitement. "The Queen," the newspapers declared, "has prepared a rout and organised a panic." "Do not be surprised,"

wrote Coray, a native of Greece, to a friend in Smyrna, "if some morning I write to tell you of the assassination of the wretched King and his wife."

These events put an end to all political action on the part of Marie Antoinette. No single weapon is left to her. She no longer presents the moving spectacle of a woman fighting practically single-handed against a whole nation in revolt in a brave endeavour to save the Crown for her son. The long, fateful strife is over. We have now but to witness the last pursuit of the Royal quarry, brought to bay at last. The Queen, who had proved herself so valiant in battle, shows the same noble calm as she faces the fierce baying pack, so eager for her blood. . . . This final phase is marked by two "Days" of special prominence, the 20th of June and the 10th of August.

The reason, or rather the *feigned* reason, for the first of these two days was the refusal of Louis XVI to approve of the extreme measures voted by the Assembly, the one which sentenced all non-constitutional priests to deportation, the other which ordered the formation below the walls of Paris of a camp of twenty thousand men, delegates from the Provinces, who were, as a matter of fact, in reality, 20,000 recruits ready for insurrection. As soon as the King's "Veto" was known the trouble began, and alarming symptoms were very frequent. Actually one day in the garden of the Tuileries the Queen was attacked and pursued by the mob, and the guard had to be hastily turned out to cover her flight. After this she went out no more. She was prepared for the worst, and busily sorted and destroyed her papers and correspondence in order that no one should be compromised in any way. To the Princesse de Lamballe, who had announced her immediate arrival, she sent the following note: "Do not come, or come as late as possible. You would be too heartbroken. . . . This band of tigers which is overrunning the kingdom

would most cruelly rejoice if it only realised what we are going through." The Princess, however, came to the Tuileries in spite of Marie Antoinette's warning; but before leaving England she made her will.

The insurrection was fixed for June 20th, the anniversary of the flight to Varennes. All the details were most carefully arranged and planned. About three o'clock in the afternoon, whilst the King and Queen and their children were all together in the King's apartment, there was a sudden alarm that a band of rioters had forced the gates of the palace and were calling loudly for the King; so Louis hurried to the Oeil-de-Boeuf to parley with them, forbidding his family to follow him. The Queen refused to obey her husband. "Let me go," she cried. "My place is with the King. . . . Of what should I be afraid? Of being killed? As well to-day as to-morrow. What more can they do to me?" She was almost forcibly dragged into the Dauphin's apartment and from thence she was hurried into the Council Chamber. Here she was placed at the end of the long room behind the great table, which served as a barrier against the mob. Before the table stood a few faithful members of the National Guard. The Queen sat down, having the Dauphin on her right hand and Madame Royale on her left. The Princesse de Lamballe stood behind, leaning on the back of the Queen's chair. Round about were grouped a few devoted friends. And, thus placed, they awaited the coming of the rioters.

Soon they entered, ushered in by Santerre. "Make room," he said to the National Guards, "let the people see the Queen." The terrible procession filed past. There were thousands of wild-eyed ragged men and women, brandishing pikes and hatchets whilst they swore at the Queen and threatened her with their weapons. Rods inscribed with the words: "Pour Marie Antoinette" were waved in front of

her and one wretch exhibited a little gibbet, to which a dirty doll was suspended, the words "Marie Antoinette à la lanterne," being scribbled beneath. Silent, motionless, the Queen endured these insults, occasionally she shivered slightly, and once she turned and said to her friends behind her. "It is too much! It is more than human patience can be expected to bear!" Santerre took up his stand close to her and acted as master of the ceremonies. "Look," he complacently instructed his savage crew; "here is the Queen, here is the Prince Royal!" and occasionally relapsing into a moralising tone he would address the Queen: "They are deceiving you, Madame; you are being led astray. The people love you more than you think!" etc. One young girl, as she passed, hurled gross insults at the "Autrichienne." "Why do you hate me?" asked the Queen. "Have I ever done you any harm?" "Not to me, personally, no; but you have brought misfortune upon the nation." "Poor child," replied the Queen, "you have been told this and you have been deceived. What possible interest could I have in bringing misfortune on the nation? I shall never see my own country again. I can only be either happy or miserable in France. I was happy when you loved me." At the Queen's words the girl began to weep: "Forgive me," she said; "it was because I did not know you; but I see now that you are very good." Santerre roughly pushed her on, exclaiming: "The woman is drunk."

Another virago handed a red woollen cap to the Queen, who took it and was beginning to place it on her own head when shouts of "Put it on your son!" were heard. She obeyed, fearing that if she did not comply with the wishes of the mob the Dauphin might be injured: a grenadier raised the child high in his arms and showed him to the people bedecked in a red cap exactly like one which his father was at the same time placing upon his powdered wig in another

hall of the palace. The poor little Prince was almost smothered and extinguished in the huge heavy woollen cap, and Santerre actually felt sorry for the boy: "Take the cap off the child," he said to Marie Antoinette; "don't you see that he is being suffocated?" And as she thanked him gratefully he came quite close to her and whispered mysteriously: "Your friends are very ill-advised, Madame . . . I know of some who would serve you better." The Queen made no reply, but she did not forget Santerre's words, and before long she found occasion to act upon them.

Toward seven o'clock the long agony was over, and the Palace was once more silent and deserted. The Queen hurried to find the King, and broke at last into convulsive sobs and tears. "Ah! Madame," cried Louis, "why did I ever bring you from your native land to endure the humiliation of such a day as this?" Marie Antoinette soon suppressed her emotion, and returned to her own apartments, where she was joined by the Princesse de Tarente, who was amazed at her calm. "Never," she wrote, "have I beheld more serenity, more broad-mindedness, or so much quiet, cool courage."

That same evening Pétion, the Mayor of Paris, pompously applauded the "magnificent warning" which the people had bestowed on those who had aforetime been their masters; and Madame Roland, among her admirers in her salon, dilated on the "righteous lesson" which had been given to the Queen, callously exclaiming: "How I wish I could have seen her long humiliation! How her pride must have suffered!"

But all this was but the beginning of the end. The month of July was terrible. The mob never quitted the Tuileries and never tired of insulting the King and Queen and shouting vile diatribes

against "Madame Veto." Marie Antoinette was in momentary terror of death. Her little dog slept in her room; she thought that, if anyone suddenly entered, the creature's bark would rouse her. She insisted on the King's wearing a kind of silken cuirass to protect him from any sudden sword thrust and had one of the same kind made for herself.

Fersen besought her to be prepared at any moment to take refuge in a secret cellar under the Louvre, the existence of which he was aware of. "Each day there is some fresh horror," wrote Marie Antoinette, "always it is directed to the same end, namely the destruction of the King and his family. Petitioners at the bar of the Assembly have declared that if the King is not dethroned they will assassinate him, and they were actually applauded." A letter to Fersen written on August 1st in invisible ink, states that "the arrival of about six hundred men from Marseilles renders our position infinitely more serious. The assassins are forever prowling around the palace: the insurgents no longer make any effort to hide their determination of exterminating the Royal Family. During the two last nights' sittings all that was needed was an agreement as to how the extermination should be effected. If help does not soon arrive Providence alone will be able to succour the King and his family."

The Powers seemed at last to have determined to advance, and during the last week of July their assembled troops began to move; at the same time they issued a proclamation which announced that the Assembly would be held responsible for any violence against Louis or his family. A firm and moderate manifesto had been drawn up by Mallet du Pan, the King's accredited agent, and duly accepted by the Duke of Brunswick, the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied forces. Alas! at the very last moment one of the emigrés, a M. de Limon, contrived to alter the text

of the manifesto and to introduce menacing and exasperating threats, which announced that Paris would be utterly destroyed and France as a whole subjected to martial law if the nation did not at once repent and implore the King's pardon.

This most unfortunate alteration in the text of the original draft of the manifesto was effected by the misplaced zeal of Fersen, and it only served to hurry on the final catastrophe; for one half of the nation took no notice whatever of the imperative and menacing summons, and the other half responded with howls of fury.

At this fateful hour mention must be made of Marie Antoinette's final, supreme effort which, until quite lately, she was only suspected of having made, and which is still wrapped in mystery, though recently-discovered documents have thrown some light upon the matter: we refer, of course, to the Queen's secret intercourse with Robespierre, Santerre, and Danton, the three leading spirits of the Revolution.

The Princesse de Lamballe acted as intermediary in the affair, and her physician, Saiffert, who took part in it has left an account of the proceedings which is unfortunately very obscure and incomplete. He refers to secret interviews with these men, during which the Queen, by making them seductive promises and assurances, endeavoured to gain their support, and at one time she seems to have hoped for some degree of success.

The recently published Memoirs of Theodore de Lameth confirm this story, and they contain moreover a sort of sequel to it. Lameth relates that d'Abancourt, who was at this period Minister of War, proposed to Louis XVI in the presence of the Queen at a Council held sometime in the beginning of August 1792, that Danton, Santerre, and their followers should be publicly arrested at the Jacobin Club; he declared,

moreover, that he had men and influence enough to accomplish effectively what he proposed. His offer was approved and accepted, and everything was accordingly arranged for the bold undertaking.

However, neither Danton nor Santerrê appeared at the Club on the appointed day—so the plot came to nothing.

Later on, when Santerre was in prison at the Carmelites, he confided to Madame d'Aiguillon, who in her turn told Lameth, that it was the Queen who had warned both himself and Danton not to show themselves at the Club lest they be arrested.

Again, Lafayette states in his Memoirs that Marie Antoinette caused a review which he had ordered to be countermanded; he had, he says, intended to harangue the soldiers by way of exciting them to attack the Jacobins; but Pétion, who had been warned by the Queen of what was contemplated, forbade the holding of the review at the very last moment. It is difficult, nay impossible, to state what *did* actually happen, but it is at least a certain fact that Danton left Paris suddenly in the very beginning of August and returned to the capital only in the afternoon of the 9th. He then perceived that the Royalist cause was irretrievably lost, and accordingly went over to the winning side; soon afterwards he openly avowed that he would either save the King's life or murder him.

If the Queen had ever cherished any faint hopes, she must have been cruelly disillusioned on that fatal evening of August 9th, 1792, that evening on which was sounded the knell of the French Monarchy, and, yet, on that very evening she said to the Marquis de Clermont-Gallerande, who was telling her of his fears: "Do you really believe that they will dare to attack the Palace? Nonsense! It's impossible!" One hour later the scales fell for ever from her eyes. During the whole of that terrible night, while the tocsin was

sounding, while in all quarters of the city the assault on the Palace was being organised and the few faithful defenders of the Tuileries were preparing themselves for the desperate and decisive struggle, the Queen, rising loyally to the emergency, seemed to know instinctively the suitable attitude to take, the right words to say. Frequently at fault when calm deliberation was a question, Marie Antoinette was the true daughter of Maria Theresa when called upon to act. She addressed the national guard with these inspiring heartening words: "Gentlemen," she cried, "all that are nearest and dearest to you, your wives, your children, everything, depends on our existence; our interests are yours also!" Then, indicating a little group of gentlemen who had rushed armed to the palace at the first alarm, she added: "Those are our most faithful friends; they will obey you in everything. Place them in the very front—they will show you how to die for your King!"

At six o'clock in the morning she accompanied her Consort during the melancholy review which he held of his troops. It was evident that she was grieved and disturbed at the confused incoherent words that he uttered, and, her head held high, her lips quivering, she strengthened by her dauntless aspect the faltering spirits of the faithful defenders of the Tuileries. Louis unfortunately, in terror of hostile action, soon insisted on her retreating into the Palace.

Shortly afterwards, when Roederer, whose particular part in the day's work is difficult to understand, came to the Tuileries and implored Louis to leave the Palace and with his wife and family seek refuge with the Assembly, Marie Antoinette resisted his proposal desperately and firmly. At first she flatly declined to leave the Tuileries; she summoned Clermont-Gallerande and the Baron de Viomesnil: "You two are honest men," she cried; "promise me

on your word of honour to nail me to the walls of this house rather than allow me to be dragged out of it!"

Meanwhile the danger was increasing and Roederer insisted more and more strongly. "If you oppose this plan, you will be responsible, Madame, for the King's life and the life of your children," he declared; and then, at last, Louis, himself spoke: "Let us go," he said. The Queen, so Lameth declares, did not at once obey. She flung herself on her knees before the door and implored her husband to carry on the struggle and relinquish the idea of flight, which would break down the defence and give over their faithful defenders to death. So intense was her emotion that, according to an eye-witness, her face and neck were covered with livid streaks. She was dragged to her feet, and at last she was forced to give in. She turned desperately to Roederer: "At least, Sir," she said, "you will be responsible for the safety of the King and his son?" "Madame," was the answer, "we promise to die in your defence, and that is the most that we *can* promise."

The deplorable exodus took place at half-past eight in the morning. The King walked alone in front; his wife followed him, holding the Dauphin by the hand; Madame Royale, Madame Elizabeth, the ministers, and a few faithful friends followed after. "I will soon come back to you," were the Queen's last words to those who remained in the Palace. Louis, as he passed, shuffled his feet along the unswept paths of the Tuileries gardens and muttered sadly: "How soon the leaves are falling this year!" The mob howled and yelled at the Royal party. As the fugitives crossed the terrace of the Fenillants a huge man dressed as a fireman shouted abuse at the Queen. "Be a good citizen," he cried to Louis, "get rid of your priests and your wife!" But this very man, a moment afterwards, seeing that the Dauphin was

being pushed about and almost torn from his distracted mother, picked the child up, set him on his shoulders, cleared the way for the Queen, and put the little Prince down only when they were all safely up the steps of the Assembly Hall.

On one side of the Council-room and separated from it by an iron railing was a kind of narrow passage or recess, in which were usually accommodated any journalists who were reporting the debates of the Assembly. The Royal family was ushered into this nook. Whilst the roar of cannon shook the building and the reports of the muskets and the noise of battle were clearly audible, whilst the faithful defenders of the Palace were being murdered and the bloody victors were triumphantly bringing the booty found in the Tuileries to the bar of the Assembly, the King sat calm and motionless, surveying the various orators through a lorgnette. The Queen, her hands clasped before her, seemed almost unaware of what was going on. Since the evening before neither Louis nor his family had tasted food; they had swallowed but a little fruit-juice and water. After some time a chicken was handed in to them: the King ate eagerly, but the Queen would only sip a few drops of iced water. When night fell, they were taken to the Fenillants and lodged there in what had been the architect's abode. Mattresses on the floor served as beds, table napkins were used for nightcaps. The fugitives were without change of garments, linen, or any table necessaries. A devoted servant named Augnié slipped a few louis into the Queen's hand, and, fearing a repulse, was hastening away when Marie Antoinette recalled him: "Monsieur Augnié," she said kindly, "is one not grateful to one's friends?" A few hours afterwards she contrived to send the following note to the Princesse de Tarente, one of her ladies-in-waiting: "I beg you to send me a chemise—I have

not taken off my clothes for two days. I embrace you with my whole heart."

The 11th and 12th of August were lived through as the 10th had been, the days being spent in the little tribune of the Assembly and the nights passed at the Fenillants. The decree of the abolition of the Monarchy was declared in the presence of the King and Queen. It was reported that Louis, as he listened, looked relieved as though a heavy burden had been lifted from his shoulders; but the Queen closed her eyes as though she had been struck on the head with a heavy club; almost at once, however, she opened them again and raised her head with her own proud, imperious air. At last, on the 13th of August, about six o'clock in the evening, the Assembly decreed that the whole party should be removed in one carriage to the Temple, to be there imprisoned in one of the towers. The carriage went at a slow pace through densely populated streets and the journey lasted two hours and a half amid the hooting, cheering crowd. It was quite dark when at length it came to an end. The Temple was gaily illuminated as though for a day of rejoicing; a fresh insult—so it seemed—to overwhelming calamity. A supper, which had been prepared beforehand and was both abundant and elegant, was for the last time served with customary etiquette and ceremony. The deputy Manuel, who had a few hours earlier abused the King at the bar of the Assembly, now stood all through the repast behind His Majesty's chair, covered, it is true, but with a perfectly respectful bearing. During the evening the men from Marseilles who were posted as sentinels around the Temple amused themselves by singing the popular refrain:

"*Madame a sa tour monte,*
Ne sait quand descendra. . . ."

Marie Antoinette's entrance into the Temple renders her henceforth a being as it were set apart, transformed; she is no longer a Queen to be analysed and criticised, she is a defenceless woman, a wife, a mother, tortured by a horde of vindictive savages. As we think of her long agony and marvel at the heroism with which she endured it, there is room in our hearts only for emotions of admiration, respect, and compassion.

CHAPTER X

CALVARY

In the Temple enclosure, near the huge mansion which had of recent years been inhabited by the Comte d'Artois, stood a great, square tower four stories in height communicating with a second and smaller tower lately inhabited by the Keeper of the Archives.

It was in this second tower that the Royal family, pending alterations in the larger one, was temporarily imprisoned. The Queen and the little Dauphin took up their abode in the second story of the tower, in two fairly spacious rooms, which were divided by a small closet. The King was installed above them and a guard was stationed on the landing. Louis, on entering the room which had been hastily prepared for him, perceived hanging on the walls of it several highly improper engravings dating from the time of the occupancy of the Comte d'Artois. These he immediately proceeded to turn back to front, fearing that his innocent children might be shocked by the sight of them. Madame Royale and Madame Elizabeth slept in a kitchen; the Princesse de Lamballe, Madame de Tourzel, and the rest of the suite, about a dozen in all, disposed of themselves in various corners of the tower, as best they could.

All doors and means of egress were guarded by municipal troops or volunteers from Marseilles, the surveillance of the captives being entrusted, according to the wording of the decree, to "the guardianship and the virtues of the good citizens of Paris."

The day after the installation in the Temple, Manuel, the Procurator of the Commune, in the course of an oration at the Hotel de Ville, expressed himself as follows: "It must be allowed that nothing in the world is so vexatious, so tiresome as a Royal family with all its appurtenances. It is more than time to get rid of this crowd of useless beings, and to remove all these women who are about the Queen, and bestow them safely away so that they will no longer be able to injure us." These remarks were vociferously applauded, and he went on to say: "I told the King's wife that I would send women with whom I was acquainted to attend upon her, to which she replied that she did not require any such and that she and the King's sister would wait upon each other: I answered: *Very well, Madame, as you decline to accept from me women to attend on you, you will have to wait on yourself—you will have no others to choose from.*" These delicate and appropriate pleasantries were received by the delighted audience with loud laughter and applause.

Manuel was as good as his word. A week later, on August the 20th, the order came that "all persons who did not actually form part of the family of Capet" must at once leave the Temple. This was a fresh and bitter grief. When the little group of faithful adherents came to take leave of the Royal family, the Queen made each one embrace her children, and said tearfully: "It is only now, gentlemen, that we begin to fully appreciate the misery of our position, for hitherto you have lightened our burdens for us by your thoughtfulness and your devotion." Hardest of all was the parting from the Princesse de Lamballe and Madame de Tourzel, who were both removed to La Force. The Queen as she bade the two ladies farewell drew Madame de Tourzel aside and implored her to look after her friend, of whose transparent simplicity and want of quickness of perception she was but too

well aware. "Take care of Lamballe," said Marie Antoinette. "Speak for her if you can and if possible see that she has no awkward questions to answer." At first, when all had departed, only Hue the King's valet remained in the Temple; he was presently joined by Cléry, who had been the Dauphin's valet. Some one was required to do the rough work, and accordingly the Commune made choice of a man named Tison, who had formerly been employed at the barriers of the city. He and his wife took up their abode in the Temple, and they acted as a matter of fact much more in the capacity of spies about the Royal captives than as their servants.

The Queen's room being the largest of those at the disposal of the prisoners, it followed that the greater part of the day was spent in it, here, too, the Dauphin and Madame Royale had all their lessons. Louis instructed his son in the elements of Latin and a little history and arithmetic, whilst Marie Antoinette taught her daughter music, drawing, embroidery, and plain sewing. Even these harmless studies were turned into sources of annoyance. The King, having arranged for his son's use a Pythagoras table, the municipal on guard imagined that secret correspondence was being carried on by a system of cipher and confiscated the table accordingly. The Queen had made Madame Royale copy in pencil various heads from the antique—Romulus, Tarquin, Cato, and others; the helmeted heads were thought by another municipal officer to be portraits of the Emperors and Kings who were combining together against France, and he ordered the seditious emblems to be destroyed.

All meals were served in a little dining-room on the first floor. Louis, as usual, had a wonderfully hearty appetite, but the Queen ate very little and that little very slowly, to give her husband time to satisfy his hunger; it was evident that she sometimes felt vexed

[*A. Rischgitz*

THE ROYAL FAMILY IN PRISON IN THE TEMPLE

(After a painting by E. M. Ward, R.A.)

[*face p. 280*

when he ate more voraciously than usual in full view of the curious callous glances of the hostile spectators. About five in the afternoon, when fine, they all went down into the garden of the Temple, and the Queen always kept the little Dauphin close beside her, so greatly did she fear that he might suddenly be snatched unexpectedly away from her.

Always and everywhere a commissioner from the Commune was close to the captives, keeping a strict watch over all their words and actions. At first some of these men thought to testify to their patriotism by rudeness. The Queen one day asked one of them which quarter of the town he lived in. "Dans la Patrie," he insolently replied. But this uncivil attitude did not last very long. Little by little the emissaries of the Commune, rough and prejudiced as they were, coming on duty as they did expecting to enjoy the spectacle of the humiliation of "Capet" and the "Austrian," were impressed by the bearing of the prisoners; to begin with they felt instinctive respect, then, in spite of themselves, pity supervened, mingled with a sense of discomfort at the part they themselves were called upon to play, and after a while many of them stole away and gave up the distasteful duty altogether, leaving the task to some of their number who were rarely changed and who became the devoted servants and friends of the prisoners.

The King and Queen, who had at first been full of mistrust and coldly silent in the presence of their keepers, gradually unbent, and began to converse with them, and there resulted a sort of easy familiarity of which some curious little stories have been handed down to posterity. One day the Queen had gone to the garden and was seated beneath a tree near the municipal officer Goret; after a little, she entered into conversation with him. The man related very entertainingly the tale of an excursion which he had once made

to Coucy-le-Château, and his account of his experiences so amused the Queen that she called to the King—who, a few yards away, was playing at ball with his son—to come and listen as well. They all talked for some time, and in a most friendly fashion, about geography, archæology, travels, and various kindred subjects.

On another occasion the Queen showed one of the gaolers a few curls of hair done up in a paper which she had cut from her children's heads at different times. She told many little stories about these souvenirs while the man praised the silky fineness of the golden curls. After the Queen had put away her treasures, she came back into the room with some drops of delicious scent on her white hands, which she waved in front of the kindly gaoler in order that he might enjoy the sweet penetrating perfume. There are not, it is true, many such scenes on record, but it is a fairly clearly established fact that, confronted with the affability, the gentleness of the King and Queen, the most hostile among their keepers were never aggressive but merely cold and indifferent in their behaviour towards the Royal prisoners.

There were, however, terrible episodes during this relatively peaceful interval. The Queen was very anxious as to the fate of Madame de Lamballe, who was a prisoner at La Force. She knew that her friend had been absolutely denuded of all her belongings, and she had contrived to send her some articles of clothing and some forks and spoons and cups. In the afternoon of September the 3rd a tremendous noise was heard beneath the walls of the Temple; a yelling mob was battering at the outer portal and trying to penetrate into the enclosure. A tricolour ribbon, which some foolish individual had drawn across the gateway, was but a feeble barrier against the frenzied populace. Soon a group of the rioters

pushed their way into the inner Court and stopped beneath the windows of the room where the Queen was playing tric-trac with her husband. They shouted Marie Antoinette's name, and Cléry, who looked out of the casement to see what the matter was, fell back, horrified and aghast. He had been confronted with a head stuck on the end of a pike, a bloody livid head, all powdered and curled—decked out as though for a fête; a head, moreover, which he recognised. The Queen, started up and asked what the matter was: no one in the room dared to answer her, but in another moment a man rushed in exclaiming: "It is the head of the Princesse de Lamballe, and they want you to see it. You had better show yourself if you do not wish the mob up here!" The Queen, on hearing the ghastly news, fell down in a dead faint, and for a long time they could not revive her. When consciousness was at last restored, she sobbed and wept for hours; and eleven months later, when in the Conciergerie her few poor remaining treasures were taken from her, they found among the rest the portrait of Madame de Lamballe, which ever since that September day she had worn upon her heart.

Marie Antoinette was hardly recovered from this dreadful shock when a new form of torture was devised. On September the 21st the Convention, which had replaced the Legislative Assembly, abolished Royalty altogether. A week later, on the 29th, a decree of the Convention ordered that the Royal family should be deprived of knives, pen-knives, scissors, pens, pencils, and writing-paper; this vexatious act of petty tyranny was but the prelude to a far more cruel measure which was announced the same day to the captives by the mouth of the sinister monster Hébert. He declared that Louis was immediately to be transferred to the great tower of the Temple and to be altogether separated from his family. The order was to be carried

out at once, and accordingly, next morning the King was forbidden to go as usual to his wife's room at the breakfast hour. The scene that ensued was heart-rending. The Queen and her children wept and sobbed, and declined to swallow any food; in fact, their grief was so excessive that it was too much for the feelings of their keepers, who decided at their own risk to let Marie Antoinette and the others go to the King's apartment at the dinner-hour. When the prisoners were told that they were to be allowed to be with the King, their joy was so great and so touchingly expressed that Simon, the notorious cobbler and one of the most repulsive figures of the Revolution, who was an eye-witness of the scene, was almost overcome by it. "I do believe," he was heard to mutter, "that these women will end by making me shed tears too!" He soon recovered himself, however, and said to the Queen: "You didn't weep on the 10th of August when you caused so many to be assassinated." "The people are much deceived about me and my sentiments," was the Queen's reply.

The affection between the King and Queen, of which this touching incident is a proof, had been intensified by their common misfortunes. Fiery trials had been needed to knit together these two beings who had for so long been kept asunder by differences in tastes as well as by their very different dispositions. Now, however, sorrow, that hard disciplinarian, had had its customary effect in smoothing away all acute angles and minimising little weaknesses. Both King and Queen were vastly improved in character. The brusqueries, the uncouth ways of Louis had been toned down by his melancholy: and his natural indolence now seemed to be transformed into calm dignity and resignation; while Marie Antoinette, instead of being, as formerly, thoughtless, quick-tempered, and haughtily disdainful, proved herself to be both courageous and

LOUIS XVI AT THE BAR OF THE CONVENTION

(After a painting by W. Miller. British Museum)

[*face p. 284*

patient as she bravely and steadily confronted her tragic destiny. At last she had become aware of all the many good qualities of him whom she had so little appreciated in the days of her prosperity, and the change in her feelings towards her husband is very evident in many letters which were written by her at this time. As for the King, his tender indulgence towards his wife, as well as his deep affection for her, are apparent in the touching, simply expressed sentence which he added to his last will and testament: "I beg my wife to forgive me all the misfortunes which she has endured for my sake and all the sorrows which I may have caused her during our union. She may rest assured that I remember nothing against her should she perhaps imagine that she has anything to reproach herself with."

During the last few days of October 1792 the whole family was together in the great tower of the Temple, and some weeks of anxious suspense dragged slowly by. Suddenly on December the 11th the little Dauphin's lesson-hour with his father was interrupted, and the child was conducted to his mother's apartment by two of the municipal guards. The Queen was surprised and startled, and all too soon she learned the meaning of what has occurred. The King's trial had begun, and on that very same day he appeared before the Convention. When in the evening Marie Antoinette attempted to go to her husband she was prevented from doing so. During the whole course of the trial Louis was not permitted to see either his wife or any other member of his family. He was informed, indeed, that he might send for his children if he chose to do so, but he was also told that if they came to him they would not be allowed to return to their mother; so naturally the King refused to avail himself of the cruel concession. For six weeks he was completely isolated from his family, and during all that time the

Queen was not allowed to see any papers or to hear any reports of the trial. The only information which she received was conveyed to her by her faithful servants, who threw tiny notes in little packets of dust or scraps of wool under her bed. On the 20th of January, early in the morning, newspaper-men passing near her window were heard calling loudly that the King was condemned to death, that a respite had been refused, and that he was to suffer the next day. Thus was Marie Antoinette apprised of her approaching widowhood.

That same evening, about half-past eight o'clock, an order came from the Convention permitting her and her family to go and bid farewell to the condemned man. She hurried to the King, holding the Dauphin by the hand. Louis was awaiting her in the little dining-room. Madame Royale and Madame Elizabeth were close behind the Queen. It was dark in the small scantily-furnished room, which contained only a bare table and a few straw-bottomed chairs and was feebly lighted by a lamp. On the table was a tumbler of water, which Louis had thoughtfully placed there in case the Queen should faint. Through the glass doors the municipal guards were dimly visible. The King was dressed in a brown suit, with a grey waistcoat; his hair was slightly powdered and tied in a queue. The Queen wore a white muslin morning-gown with a linen kerchief crossed on her breast and it was noticed that beneath her white linen cap her hair had in front become quite white. They rushed into each other's arms, and at first there was a long silence, which was soon broken by sobs and tears. The King then sat down between his wife and his sister, who both wrapped their arms around him. Madame Royale knelt before him and he took the little Dauphin on his knee. Through the glass doors the municipal officers could catch a confused sound of

lamentation and a long, low murmuring of voices, broken by sobs and tears: then there was a whispered conversation of which no one was ever told the purport.

After about an hour and a half the King rose from his chair. The Queen implored him to let her and the children remain with him on this, his last night on earth; but he refused her request, saying that he must be quiet and alone in order to prepare for death. What he really feared, however, was the too grievously prolonged agony of farewell for his dear ones. Then the Queen begged that at least he would consent to see her once more next morning before going to execution. "Yes," said Louis, "I will see you at eight o'clock." "Why not at seven o'clock?" "Very well, so be it, at seven o'clock. Good-bye." With these words he strained them all convulsively to his heart and quickly went into the inner room, where his confessor was awaiting him. The Queen crept upstairs to her apartment, murmuring to herself: "The savages, the monsters!" She undressed and soothed to sleep the poor little Dauphin, and then flung herself just as she was on her own bed, where, says Madame Royale "we heard her sobbing and trembling with cold all night." By six o'clock she was pacing up and down, waiting for the summons from the King. She waited in vain: Louis had made up his mind to spare her and them all another agonizing interview, and he charged Cléry to explain his reasons for his decision. "Tell them what it costs me to go without receiving their last embraces—you must say farewell to them for me." He also handed to the valet a few cherished trifles for Marie Antoinette, his wedding-ring, his signet ring, and an envelope containing some locks of hair. He then gave himself up to Santerre, and the mournful procession left the Temple.

The Queen, sick and faint, stretched on her bed, spent the dreadful morning in a state of acute anguish,

listening for every sound, sometimes almost unconscious, sometimes starting up with a sort of desperate, vain hope of she knew not what. Suddenly, about mid-day, the rumbling of the cannons returning to barracks was heard, and there were also shouts of "Vive la République!" and joyful yells: she understood at last that all was over. She implored her gaolers to give her details of the last moments; she entreated to be permitted to see Cléry. Both requests were refused. Finally, in desperation, she questioned the municipal officer on duty, the man named Goret, who was kindly enough and he thus reports the interview: "The widow motioned me to come near, and I approached at once. She was sitting with Madame Elizabeth and the children round a little table and they were all weeping bitterly. 'Madame,' I said in a trembling voice, 'You must bear up for the sake of your family.' I could say nothing more. Between her sobs and tears she said to me: '*I know that the dreadful thing has happened. We heard all the preparations this morning, the movements of the men and the horses. Our misfortune is only too certain and we desire to be provided with mourning garments.*'" The officer, touched, overcome, and hardly able to speak, muttered: "Alas! Madame, alas! Madame"; but he managed to promise to see about the black garments: "*Very simple ones*," added the Queen, and, after two days' debate, this modest request was granted her.

Henceforth, in order not to see the door of the King's room which she was obliged to pass in going downstairs, Marie Antoinette refused to walk in the garden of the Temple. For a time she kept entirely to her room. A few weeks later, during the month of February, she consented to go out in the platform of the great tower to get a little air.

In her deep distress she still possessed one consolation in the devotion of three humble individuals whose

hearts had been touched by her misfortunes. These men were named respectively Turgy, Toulan, and Lepitre; later on they were joined by a fourth, whose name was Michonis.

Turgy had formerly been employed in the kitchens of Versailles, and had managed to get himself taken on in the service of the prisoners in the Temple. He was the secret agent of their correspondence and acted as the astute go-between with their friends outside the prison. It was he who had thought out the plan of secreting notes in little lumps of wool, and he sometimes also rolled them round the corks of the carafes of water which he placed upon the dinner-table. He had also a complete system of signs and signals with the prisoners, and they learnt from him under the very eyes of their gaolers what was happening in Paris and between the foreign powers. Madame Elizabeth had arranged the code of signals. Thus: the hand touching the top of the head signified that the Convention was retiring; the right thumb on the right eye meant a landing of the English; and so on. For over fourteen months these secret communications were carried on; nearly every day the prisoners sent and received notes without ever being found out. There were occasional alarms; for instance, one day Tison took up the paper-stopper of the carafe, put it in his pocket, and carried it off to examine it at his leisure: the anxiety was terrible and it was feared that all would be discovered; but the note had been written in invisible ink and Tison could make nothing of it.

Toulan had a more important part to play. He was born at Toulouse in 1761, and since his marriage had lived in Paris and had been employed on several occasions in the Offices of the Commune; he was a member of the Club for men of the Revolution and had given convincing proofs of his Jacobin tendencies.

When he first entered the Temple he cherished sentiments of hatred and repulsion for Marie Antoinette; but two days sufficed to win him over to the Queen's cause, and his fidelity to her, which ultimately cost him his life, never wavered for one instant. He was a sentimental Gascon, and he became possessed with the idea that he must at all costs save the lives of the Royal family. He it was who planned the first escape from the Temple, and he was the moving spirit in all the other attempts. He had in order to aid him in the arduous task which he had undertaken made friends with one of his colleagues, another of the commissioners of the Temple, whom the Queen had indicated to him as a likely man and whose name was Lepitre. This individual had formerly been a professor at the College of Lisieux and afterwards rector of a little boarding-school in the Rue St Jacques. He was about thirty years of age, short and stout. He was something of a pedant and a good public speaker. He was also of a timorous disposition and always endeavoured to keep open some means of retreat for himself from any dangerous enterprise; he was, however, sincerely devoted to Marie Antoinette, and she figures as the heroine in several excessively thrilling romances which he has written in her honour. By clever manœuvring the two men contrived to be very often on duty at the same time. They planned together a highly-complicated, romanesque undertaking, by means of which there would be at least a chance of saving the Queen and her children, and one day Toulan managed to acquaint Marie Antoinette of what they proposed to attempt.

The two conspirators intended to smuggle into the prison various garments which would be needed to disguise the whole family—men's suits and tricoloured sashes for the Queen and her sister-in-law and a little boy's suit for Madame Royale who was

to be passed off as the son of the lamplighter. The Dauphin they meant to hide in a wicker basket beneath a pile of linen. The Tisons were to be put to sleep by a narcotic, which would be mixed with their snuff. It was more than probable that by all these stratagems it might be possible to elude the vigilance of the sentinels. One wonders if the Queen cherished any great hope of success as she sat listening to Toulan. At any rate it was her one and only chance of escape. She had quite given up hope of any help from abroad; the coalition of the Powers, even if victorious, would but precipitate her doom. Fersen in writing to Mercy had observed recently: "One can only help the Queen by doing nothing for her." She therefore listened to Toulan's plan for her escape, but she laid down one condition, namely that the co-operation of a third party, and one whom she rightly considered to be more practical and more intelligent than either Toulan and Lepitre should be obtained. The man she singled out as suitable was the Chevalier de Jarjayes.

This distinguished soldier, the husband of one of the most devoted of the Queen's bedchamber-women, had ever since the outbreak of the Revolution been actively zealous in the cause of the Royal family and had several times been engaged in very dangerous enterprises on their behalf. The execution of Louis XVI had almost overwhelmed him, and he had ever since been sunk in a sort of despairing apathy, when suddenly, on February 2nd, 1793, a stranger handed him a note in a handwriting which he at once recognised as that of Marie Antoinette. The note ran as follows: "You can place full confidence in the man who will address you in my name and give you this note. He is well known to me; he has not varied in his attitude during the last five months. . . ." The man was, of course, Toulan, who at once proceeded to unfold to Jarjayes his plan for the rescue of the Royal family. A few

days afterwards a second letter from the Queen introduced Lepitre, but in less flattering terms than those she had accorded to Toulan: "You must see this new individual. His exterior is not prepossessing, but, as we cannot do without him, we must use him."

As a precautionary measure, Jarjayes requested Toulan to find some means of getting him into the Temple in order that he might receive Marie Antoinette's commands from her own lips; and his entrance was actually effected. In the dingy habiliments of a lamp-cleaner, he entered the Queen's apartment, exchanged a few whispered words with her, and retired convinced.

Henceforth he was the responsible party in the hazardous enterprise. He reorganized the plan in some ways. He found the necessary ready cash and planned the details to be carried out in leaving the Temple; he prepared relays of horses at the various stopping places on the route to Havre; he freighted the vessel which was to bear the fugitives to safety on British soil. All was ready, all was arranged, with the one exception of the passports, which Lepitre, who was an official at the office where they were prepared, had undertaken to procure. Lepitre it was who ruined the enterprise. Ever anxious and fearful for his personal safety, he hesitated and put off the doing of what he had promised to perform, and much precious time was lost. At length, on March 2nd, he did at last bring the necessary papers, and the date of the attempted escape was fixed for the 8th of the month. On the 7th, at the report of a reverse which had been sustained by the French army, there was disturbance and insurrection in Paris and "La Patrie" was declared to be in danger. All passports for abroad were suspended immediately; to leave the country would have been practically impossible. Perhaps—but this is mere guesswork—the Tisons may have suspected something,

and the strictness of the new travelling regulations may have been prompted by information which they imparted to the authorities. Certain it is, whatever the cause, that the opportunity was irretrievably lost.

In spite of the bitter disappointment, neither Jarjayes nor Toulan gave up all hope. To engineer the flight of four persons from the Temple would henceforth be evidently quite impracticable, but might there not be a chance of saving one person, and the one, moreover, who was in such deadly peril. Surely it might be possible to smuggle the Queen out of her prison. This time they were careful not to consult with Lepitre. Toulan undertook to effect the escape from the Temple, and Jarjayes knew a way of managing the difficult business of getting out of France; they both felt sure that their plans would be successful, and they only waited for the Queen's assent. Would she flee, alone, leaving her children and her sister-in-law in their dismal prison? For long she resisted all the entreaties of her two brave, devoted friends. At last Toulan's representations and Madame Elizabeth's entreaties prevailed over her scruples; both assured her that the lives of her dear ones left behind would not be in danger; she promised that she would make the attempt—the day was fixed and everything in readiness.

During the evening of the day before the one on which it had been planned that she should escape, the Queen was evidently in a state of extreme agitation; she was walking up and down in her room a great part of the night. When Toulan appeared next morning she came quickly towards him and said: "You will be very angry with me, but I have been thinking over matters. Death will be better than eternal remorse," and she handed him a note for Jarjayes which runs as follows: "We have had a beautiful dream, but it is over. But we have gained a great deal, for all this

has given me fresh proof of your great devotion to me. I place my whole trust in you. You will ever find me to be firm and courageous, but my son's welfare is my one thought, and, happy as I should be to be out of this place, I cannot consent to be separated from him. I could not rejoice in anything whatsoever if I forsook my children, and so I do not regret giving up the idea of flight."

There were various other attempts at escape from the Temple, but the accounts relating to them are vague, and no exact dates or details are available. M. de Batz was the originator of what was apparently the most carefully thoughtout scheme. He had acquired the assistance of Cortey and Michonis, two of the municipal officers. An anonymous note containing the words: "Michonis will betray you to-night. Be on the watch," and addressed to Simon, caused the plot to fail. Simon was immediately on the alert, and though nothing incriminating was discovered, the proposed attempt had to be abandoned.

On June 3rd a disagreeable incident upset the Queen's nerves. For several days the woman Tison had seemed very irritable and excited in manner, and on this morning she suddenly came into Marie Antoinette's apartment screaming and crying. Throwing herself on her knees she sobbed: "Madame! Madame! forgive me Madame; I implore Your Majesty's pardon. . . . I am a most miserable woman! . . ." The Queen tried to soothe her and spoke gently to her, whereupon her cries redoubled and she exclaimed: "Alas, Madame! I am the cause of your death and of the death of Madame Elizabeth!" She crawled on her knees from the Queen to the Princess, and her cries and groans became positively alarming. The guards looked on aghast. At last she was dragged away in such a convulsed condition that it took eight men to hold her. She was taken to the Hospital of the

Hôtel Dieu and it was long before she recovered her health. Marie Antoinette wrote compassionately to Toulan: "Is the woman Tison as mad as they say? Is she well taken care of?"

Too soon did the unfortunate Queen know the meaning of the woman's despairing remorse. The day after she had been removed, the Ministry of Public Safety commanded that, on account of secret information imparted by the Tisons, the Royal child —"Louis Capet," as the wretches called him—should be separated from his mother and placed in some other part of the prison where his education would be looked after. Later in the evening of July 3rd, accordingly, a band of Municipal officers repaired to the Temple. The Dauphin was in bed and asleep, and the Queen sitting close to him; Madame Elizabeth beside her was mending some of his torn garments, while Madame Royale read the evening prayers aloud. The men entered, and at the first words of the commissioner the Queen sprang up, quivering, aghast. Take away her child! They should kill her first! she cried. She stood before the bed, her arms extended, forbidding the intruders to approach. However, they insisted, declaring that the law allowed them to use force. The Queen was in despair. She wept, she almost raved, she implored, she threatened, she flung her arms round her son, shielding him with her own body. The poor child, awakened from his sleep, terrified and amazed, sobbed loudly, and so did his sister and his aunt. The room re-echoed with moans and cries.

The dreadful struggle had lasted more than an hour, when at last the Queen, broken and worn out and also, it is said, terrified by the monsters' threats that if she resisted longer they would murder both her children before her eyes, fell half-fainting across the foot of the bed and ceased her vain, frenzied resistance.

She even managed to dress the child with her trembling hands, and whispered a few farewell words to him. The poor little terrified Dauphin was dragged away, and never more did his mother behold her darling son, excepting occasionally, from afar off, when he was taken to walk on the platform of the Tower. She would stand for long hours with her eyes glued to a hole in the planks which blocked up the turrets of the tower, watching for him to pass. It was but a momentary glimpse and he seemed to be pale and emaciated, and he was clad in the carmagnole and decked out in a red cap. . . . She must have been only too well aware of what the poor child was made to endure.

It is said that when he was first taken away the Dauphin lay for two whole days on the floor and declined all food. The cobbler Simon and his wife, who had replaced his mother as guardians, were perhaps not intentionally as barbarous in their dealings with the boy as has sometimes been declared; but to this nine-year-old child, who always, even in his prison, had been loved and petted, made the object of the tenderest, the most delicate care and affection, the sudden change to the abode of these two stupid, rude, dirty, rough creatures, who were always swearing and uttering coarse, indecent words, must have been appalling. M. le Nôtre remarks that Simon and his wife probably appeared to the little Prince to be more like wild beasts than human beings, and this is no exaggerated statement. What they succeeded in making of him, both physically and morally, is alas but too well known! . . .

Marie Antoinette had now suffered the sharpest pang of her long agony. When in the month following they came to inform her that she was to be transferred to the Conciergerie, there to await her trial, this forewarning of certain death was evidently almost a matter of indifference to her.

It was the 2nd of August and about one o'clock in the morning when several municipal officials forced their way into the Queen's bedchamber and informed her of the order of the Convention, which was to be carried out at once. Troops had been massed round the Temple; an escort of twenty gendarmes was waiting in the Court. The Queen got out of bed, dressed rapidly, embraced her daughter and Madame Elizabeth, put a few of her belongings into a small parcel, and followed her gaolers. As she left the tower she struck her forehead violently against the low lintel. She was asked if she had hurt herself. "Oh no, nothing can hurt me now!" she answered. The little procession reached the Conciergerie about three o'clock in the morning, and the Queen was taken into the cell which had been prepared for her and which had been occupied by General Custine, who had been moved elsewhere. It was situated on the ground floor, was low in the roof, damp, cold, and poorly furnished. It was at the end of a long corridor and called the Council room. It is now the canteen of the prison.

The Queen was quite calm: she seemed indeed almost indifferent, though drops of sweat were visible on her brow. She silently looked round at the bare walls, then she glanced at her two keepers, Gilbert and Dufresne; there were also two women to wait on her, one very old, the mother of the turnkey, and the other quite a young girl from Picardy, named Rosalie Lamorlière, a simple, kindly creature, who was always gentle and pitiful towards the Royal captive. The old woman was soon replaced by another, called Harel, a coarse fish-wife, whom Marie Antoinette disliked and distrusted.

The new existence began. The morning was passed in making a very careful toilette: the Queen was careful of her person up to the last. After her death

a little box of pomade and another of powder and a swan's-down puff were found in her room. A mirror had been refused her, but every morning Rosalie Lamorlière lent the Queen her own. Marie Antoinette arranged her hair very simply. She parted her abundant tresses on her forehead and powdered them slightly, then tied them back with a ribbon into a large knot at the back of her head. Her wardrobe was not as ill-furnished as some historians have declared it to have been. A kind of little trousseau had been sent to her from the Temple. There were fifteen chemises of fine linen, lace-trimmed, twenty-eight handkerchiefs, two morning gowns, five pairs of corsets, petticoats, stockings, shoes, and other necessary habiliments. The food was passable. The wife of the concierge, Madame Richard, was a fairly good cook and was careful with what she sent to table. "All that you give me to eat is excellent," the Queen often said to her. Moreover, the market-women of the quarter, knowing whom the viands were for, would sometimes provide very choice and tasty vegetables, poultry and fruit, and moreover frequently declined to take payment for them, saying: "It is for our Queen."

The afternoons were passed in reading. *The Voyages of Captain Cook*, *The Revolution in England*, and *The Voyage of Young Anarchisis*—the Queen read all these; and sometimes she would watch the gaolers playing their interminable game of piquet. Her needles had been taken away, and she evolved the plan of crocheting with pins and some threads, which she had pulled out of the canvas, which was nailed on the walls of the cell; later on, by means of a toothpick, she managed to make garters for her children. Such were the occupations and the amusements of the woman who had been Queen of France! She was allowed neither lamp nor candle; the long evenings were passed in almost complete darkness, and she had to undress by the

feeble reflection of a lamp which was outside in the women's courtyard.

But the worst torture was the eternal surveillance to which she was subjected; the long hours passed in the company of the two gaolers, who never let her out of their sight, who were present at all and every detail of her existence, who watched her every gesture. It is true that after a while they became somewhat more humane: for example they ceased smoking during the night, and even occasionally brought her offerings of flowers. A more precious concession, but a very risky one, lay in the fact that they systematically ignored the presence of certain visitors who, feigning curiosity, made their way into the Conciergerie in borrowed garments. Here is to be found the explanation of that curious and much-discussed episode, which now appears to be authentically established as having actually taken place, the entrance, in fact, of a non-constitutional priest into Marie Antoinette's cell and of his having been allowed to say a Mass there, at which the Queen and her gaolers communicated.

This priest was the Abbé Magnin, a fervent apostle, who, disguised as a vendor of old clothes and calling himself "Monsieur Charles," regularly carried on his priestly office during the whole period of the Terror. He was to be met everywhere in the discharge of his duties, in the prisons, in the streets, anywhere, everywhere in fact; he died as Curé of the parish of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, after the Restoration. A pious personage named Fonché, who was acquainted with Richard the turnkey of the Conciergerie, acted as intermediary, and with the knowledge of Richard and his wife the priest was able to visit the Queen on several occasions and also heard her confession and gave her the Blessed Sacrament. Later the gaoler Bault, who replaced Richard, was equally obliging,

and even on one occasion allowed Mass to be said on an improvised altar and supplied the necessary candles.

Thus the Queen in her dreary prison was enabled to assist at an orthodox Mass and communicated together with the two gendarmes, who were that day on duty and who both fell under the axe of the guillotine after the Prairial rising.

These singular events are related by Mademoiselle Fonché and also by the Abbé Magnin himself, who, thirty years after the death of Marie Antoinette, solemnly swore to the truth of the tale, from his own pulpit, before his congregation. In more recent times M. le Nôtre's researches have confirmed all the details.

There is not so much reliable evidence available about the other attempt at rescue, which is known as the Conspiracy of the Carnation or the Carnation Plot, and which occurred about this same time. The number and the variety of the different versions regarding the incident make it difficult to be sure of what actually took place, and only the barest outline of the affair can be given in these pages. The name of the chief actor in the plot is known. He was the Chevalier de Rougeville, a gentleman of fortune, a turbulent, rough, unscrupulous fellow, who was however extraordinarily plucky and courageous and almost fanatically devoted to the Royal family. Twice he had been imprisoned on account of his aggressive attitude, and now he had but one object in life and that one a fixed determination to save Marie Antoinette from the guillotine even at the cost of his own head. He made friends with Michonis, who, as we know, had long been devoted in the Queen's service, and it seems to be pretty certain that he contrived to gain the support of Richard and his wife. It is at any rate a fact that on August the 28th, 1793, Rougeville and Michonis came together into the room where were the Queen, the two gendarmes, and the waiting woman, Madame

Harel. Whilst Michonis talked with the prisoner, Rougeville let drop two carnations near the stove; the Queen did not at first notice his action, but he managed unperceived to signal to her to pick the flowers up, which she presently did. A few moments after this the Chevalier, Michonis, and the Queen contrived to step aside behind a screen and they exchanged a few words, regarding which the various reports differ considerably. The account in Fersen's Journal runs as follows: "The Queen said to Rougeville that he was taking too great risks. He begged her to have courage and said that he would bring money and win over the gendarmes; to which she replied: "I am weak and exhausted," and then placing her hand on her heart she added: "But my heart is not!" The few whispered words passed unnoticed by the gaolers. As soon as her visitors had left, the Queen contrived to read the notes which had been hidden between the petals of the carnations. The contents of these notes are unknown, but they probably gave the details of the plan of escape. Marie Antoinette had neither pen nor pencil with which to write in reply, so she made use of a pin, with which she pricked holes in a tiny scrap of paper. In the year 1876 a learned scholar patiently endeavoured for long to decipher the communication which was contained in that scrap of paper and he finally managed to make out the following: "*Je suis gardée à vue. Je ne parle à personne. Je me fie à vous. Je viendrai.*" (I am watched. I speak to no one. I trust to you. I will come.)

The accounts of what took place afterwards are extremely vague and confused. Did the Queen take the gendarme Gilbert into her confidence? Or had the man some other means of discovering what was going on? Did Rougeville again gain access to the prison, and did he have a second interview with Marie Antoin-

ette, during which the arrangements for her escape were more fully discussed? These questions cannot be settled with any degree of certainty; but it is a fact that the affair was betrayed by Gilbert to the authorities, that Michonis was arrested and put to death forthwith, that Rougeville contrived to make good his escape, and that early in September members of the Convention came to the prison and subjected the Queen to a rigid examination.

She replied very calmly to all their questions, and acknowledged only what could not possibly be denied; she also cleverly avoided saying anything that could compromise any friends who were loyal to her cause. Nothing definite was ever discovered. But henceforth the Royal prisoner was much more strictly guarded: her watch, her seals, her rings, all her various trinkets were taken from her; happily the searchers did not discover a locket containing a portrait of the Dauphin and a lock of his hair, which had been wrapped in one of his little gloves and sewn into his mother's corsets. The Queen's gaolers were changed, her cell was rigorously watched and no visitors of any sort or kind were any longer permitted. Finally, on the 14th of September, she was taken from her cell and moved to another part of the prison which was considered to be more secure.

This second cell to which the Queen was removed is nowadays shown to the public, and there are few Parisians who have not at some time or other made a pilgrimage to the hallowed spot.

The room which is shown is in truth the actual one which was inhabited by Marie Antoinette, but its aspect is quite different from what it was in her time. It had been the dispensary of the prison and was a large, nearly square apartment, with two windows, one of which looked on the women's courtyard, the other on the infirmary. Thick, heavy iron bars were

placed in front of the window which gave on the yard and the other one was walled up altogether, this one has since been replaced by the ponderous door, with its enormous bolts, which is now the only entrance to the room. This part of the cell was occupied by the two gaolers who, only separated from the Queen by a low screen, were thus in a position to watch her every movement, and in this wretched hole the Queen passed the last thirty-five days of her existence.

The Carnation Plot had a further result in that it hastened on the Queen's trial and her appearance before the Tribunal of the Terror. For a long time, and even after her removal to the Conciergerie, the leaders of the Revolution had by no means decided on the fate of Marie Antoinette and it would seem as though only a few of them seriously entertained the idea of putting her to death. Danton, among others, had sworn that he would save her life. By way of keeping his oath, he had, in his violent diatribes against her at the Cordeliers Club, always, in former days, declared that the King ought to repudiate her and that she ought to be sent back to Vienna. Ever since the murder of the King he had, so it is said, lent himself to a certain mysterious intrigue which was undertaken with a view of furthering her escape and which was doubtless "the secret information," which at the Queen's trial was handed by Robespierre to the jury and which finally sealed her doom.

Many members of the Convention disliked the idea of murdering a woman and only voted for the Queen's trial in order to coerce Austria and force her to propose terms of peace.

Marie Antoinette, herself, at the bottom of her heart, cherished this hope. "The Queen does not think that she will be condemned to death" said the woman Richard one day to Rosalie Lamorlière." She believes that her relatives will ransom her, she told me this

with the most delightful frankness. If she leaves us Rosalie, she will take you with her as her maid!" Long afterwards, when Rosalie was questioned on the subject, she replied that on one occasion, when the death of Louis XVI was referred to in the Queen's presence, she observed that "he was fortunate in that he had died for France, but that she herself expected to be sent to Austria with her children."

The discovery of the plot however was used by the extremists as a pretext to force the hands of the more timid among their colleagues, and on September 2nd, at eleven o'clock at night, the Committee of Public Safety met secretly at the house of Pache, Mayor of Paris. The sitting lasted all night. One of the Committee's secretaries who was in the pay of Britain sent an account of the proceedings to the British government, and the details of what he wrote have been made public. Hébert, Barrère, Jean Bon, Saint André, and some other kindred spirits all voted for the death of the Queen on political grounds. "The death of Capet," they declared, "was more particularly the act of the Convention, whereas the death of his widow would be the act of Paris, of the tribunal and the army of the Revolution." Marie Antoinette's life-blood was needed to seal the bond between all parties. To various objections made by some of the gentler spirits present, Hébert barbarously proclaimed that he had "promised the people the head of Antoinette; I will go and cut it off myself if I have to wait much longer for it," and declared: "I have promised it in your name to the Sansculottes who are clamouring for it and without whose support you yourselves would cease to exist. Love of the Republic urges them on to join themselves to us in this sacrifice of expiation and you can actually pause and hesitate! . . ." He left the room at the close of his tirade leaving his colleagues in a state of confusion and dismay. At

last they decided to send for the Public Accuser and discussed the matter with him. He said that he would guarantee the fact of his being able to obtain the death sentence if only a few week-kneed jurors could be disposed of. This was accordingly arranged and the Committee made up its mind to proceed with the murder of the Queen.

For about a month vain and frantic efforts were made to find matter for the act of accusation. All the late King's papers were ransacked, Madame Royale and Madame Elizabeth were tortured with vile and horrible questions, everyone who had ever known Marie Antoinette and who could be laid hold of, was rigorously examined and nothing of moment was discovered against her. The Dauphin, alone, a poor child, nine years of age—brutalised and terrorised as he was by his keepers—let fall a compromising and slanderous reply to a question on a subject which he did not in the least comprehend.

On October the 12th Herman, the President of the Tribunal, subjected the Queen to a long, cruel examination. All the old stories against her were revived once more, the hundreds of millions despatched to Austria, the understanding with the emigrés, the treason of the so-called "Austrian Society," the plots to massacre the people. Marie Antoinette replied to all the odious charges in a calm and dignified manner without letting one single word escape her that could by any possibility injure her friends and her dependants. "Never for one instant have you ceased to wish to destroy the liberty of the people," declared Herman: "you have desired to govern, cost what it might, and to remount the Throne over the corpses of good patriots." "We have never required to remount the Throne," replied the Queen calmly, "we are already there and we have never desired anything save happiness to France." Herman presently

grew weary of baiting the prisoner and of meeting with no success. He relapsed into silence and finally took his departure, after naming to Marie Antoinette the two advocates who had been chosen to defend her at the bar of the Assembly. These men were Chauveau-Lagarde and Tronson Ducondray and it was arranged that the trial should begin on Monday, October the fourteenth at eight o'clock in the morning.

Chaumette, the procurator of the Commune, momentarily conceived the idea of bringing a girl-of-the-town named d'Eglé (imprisoned on account of her "aristocratic leanings") to trial with the Queen. This arrangement would have appealed to his sense of humour. However, the Committees opposed the plan, and he had to abandon it. A few days later Beugnot asked the girl d'Eglé, who was in prison with him, what she would have done had she found herself in the fatal tumbril with the Queen of France. "I would have played a fine trick on those rascals," she replied. "And how would you have managed that?" "How?—I would have thrown myself on my knees before her as we drove along and I would not have got up, no, not for the executioner, nor for the Devil himself!"

I will not recapitulate all the well-known details of the trial, which lasted without intermission from eight o'clock in the morning to four in the afternoon, then from five o'clock till eleven at night, and finally next day from nine o'clock till three. All through these twenty mortal hours the Queen, clad in mourning, her carefully dressed hair covered with a linen cap with a band of black crêpe, proud and majestic in her bearing, sat confronting Fouquier-Tinville, and listened unflinchingly to the outrages of the prosecution, the foolish or insulting questions of the President and the Jury, and to the occasional threatening murmurs of the mob of knitting women clustered together in

a corner; her hands alone, resting on the bar before her, denoted her inward agitation, for her fingers moved nervously from time to time. She listened to the charge of depleting, for her brother's benefit, the National Treasury, of inciting to foreign warfare, of promoting civil strife, and of causing good patriots to be slain. She listened to the depositions of witnesses, some of whom merely ranted instead of quoting facts, and to others who muttered vague, baseless insinuations. Finally, she heard the monstrous imputation which the abominable Hébert had put into the mouth of the Dauphin; then, and only then, did she for one moment depart from her Royal calm, and her appeal to "all Mothers" rang through the hall, searing, as with a red-hot iron, the visage—the despicable visage, of her calumniator.

At the close of the second day's sitting nothing had been proved against the Queen. Public opinion was favourable. A workman was heard to say: "She will get off. She spoke like an angel. They will only deport her." Marie Antoinette herself had a gleam of hope. Once, after a brilliant reply, she whispered to Chaveau-Lagarde: "Did I speak with too great dignity?" And seeing his surprise, she added: "Because I heard a woman of the people say to her neighbour: '*How proud she is!*'" Probably she feared that her judges would form the same opinion. Her chief sensations appear to have been physical fatigue—exhaustion. She had been ill for several weeks, for twenty-four hours she had swallowed but a few mouthfuls of soup and sipped a little water, barely sufficient to keep her from fainting. At the close of the proceedings, in descending a slippery staircase, she was obliged to ask the help of De Busne, the officer of her guard: "I can hardly see," she said to him. The officer removing his cap, offered his arm, and for that simple act of courtesy he was imprisoned the next day.

Fouquier's address and the pleadings of the defence lasted all the evening and a good part of the night. Not till four o'clock in the morning were the proceedings suspended in order that the jury might retire to consider their verdict. It was bitterly cold. A great concourse of people, who seemed weighed down by dread, waited for news. Only whispers were heard for spies were everywhere. From an open window a voice announced: "The jury is deliberating," and a shudder ran through the crowd. There was not long to wait. Each juror had been informed that the guillotine would be the lot of any man who voted for clemency. The vote for the death-sentence was accordingly unanimous. The farce was over. The curtain was about to rise on the last tragic act.

The jury came back to the hall, and the Queen was brought in. Motionless, dry-eyed, she heard sentence pronounced amid the ferocious applause of a handful of scoundrels. She seemed, said Chauveau-Lagarde "more surprised than dismayed." When asked if she had anything to say, she merely shook her head, herself opened the gate of the bar at which she stood, and silently withdrew. Right royally, her head held high, she faced the curious, gaping crowd which thronged on her passage.

It was nearly five o'clock in the morning when the Queen re-entered the Conciergerie, where, according to reliable witnesses, she was put into the condemned cell. She at once demanded ink and paper, and obtained this favour, hitherto denied her. Now it was that she wrote, calmly, with a firm hand, in her fine, neat writing that letter to her sister-in-law, the original of which is to be seen to-day in the National Archives. It is blotted with her tears, and but few can look on it dry-eyed. It is a long letter; I will only give a few extracts:

"This October 16th, at half-past four in the morn-

ing. To you, my sister, I write for the last time. I have just been condemned, not to a shameful death—that is only for criminals—but to go and rejoin your brother. I am innocent, as he was, and I hope to be, like him, steadfast to the last. I am calm, as one is when one's conscience is clear. I feel the deepest grief in leaving my children. You know that I only lived for them. . . ." Various directions for the good of the children follow, from which I quote these lines: "My son must never forget his father's last words, which I expressly repeat to him: *Never to seek to avenge our death.*" Towards the close of her letter occur these words, which seem to be one last thought addressed to him whose affection had been her greatest happiness and who was, she well knew, far away, torn with anxiety on her behalf. "I had friends; the thought of leaving them for ever and of their sorrow is one of my chief regrets in dying. At least let them know that in my last moments I think of them." The letter closes thus: "Farewell, my dear, dear friend, if only this letter reaches you! Never forget me. I kiss you again and again; also my poor darling children. Oh, God! It is heartrending to leave them for ever! . . ."

As the Queen had foreseen, this letter never reached its destination. Fouquier-Tinville intercepted it, sealed it, and consigned it to Robespierre, among whose papers it was found by Courtois of the Convention after the 9th Thermidor. He, in his turn, appropriated it. At the Restoration, it was declared to be genuine by Courtois, and was seized with other stolen relics by the Royalist Government.

The letter finished, the Queen threw herself on the bed. She lay there for some time, her face turned towards the window, her cheek resting on her hand. Rosalie Lamorlière found her thus, her face bathed in tears. The girl brought some soup. "Ah, child," said Marie Antoinette, "I do not want anything.

All is over for me." However, Rosalie insisted, and the Queen swallowed a few spoonfuls. Presently, Girard, formerly curé of Saint-Landry, now Vicar-General to Gobel, the constitutional Bishop of Paris, entered the cell and offered his priestly services, which the Queen curtly declined. "But, Madame," he urged, "what will be said when it is known that you refused the last offices of religion?" "You may say," replied the Queen, "to all who question you, that God's mercy has provided for me"—an evident allusion to the visits of the Abbé Magnin.

Towards eight o'clock the Queen signified a wish to dress and change her linen and garments. According to Rosalie Lamorlière, the officer on guard refused all entreaties to look away for a moment and respect the modesty of a dying woman, and the Queen was made to suffer this meaningless indignity. She put on a black skirt, which she covered with a white one, and a white bodice tied with ribbons at the wrist, with a white muslin fichu. In going to her death she thus put off her mourning for him whom she was about to rejoin in the grave. She had no clean cap, and one of the serving women lent her one—a plain linen cap without lappets: with this she covered her hair. These preparations completed, the turnkey entered the cell. The Queen, who was kneeling by the bed, rose when she saw him. "Larivière," she said, "you know they are going to kill me!" As she spoke, four members of the Tribunal came in, hat in hand: they came to read the death-sentence to her for the second time: she listened in absolute silence.

As the clerk pronounced the last words, the executioner, Henri Sanson, a huge, youngish man, appeared in his turn. "Hold out your hands," he said. Then, for a moment, the Queen shrank back. "Must you bind my hands? They did not bind the King's hands!" "Do your duty," said the magistrate to

Sanson. "Oh, God!" murmured the Queen, as the man savagely seized her wrists, binding them roughly and needlessly tight behind her back. She sighed, raised her eyes to Heaven, and courageously forced back her tears. Then the man took off her cap, seized her abundant hair and cut it off short at the neck. The Queen, at the contact of the knife, thought she was to die there, on the spot; she turned sharply, and saw the executioner in the act of stuffing her hair into his pocket. Those long, fair tresses were burnt in the vestibule after the execution.

At eleven o'clock in the morning, the prison portals opened for the passing of the victim. From earliest dawn the call to arms had resounded in all quarters of the city, and armed forces were assembled. Cannons were placed on the squares and street-crossways, patrols paraded the streets; thirty thousand men were astir to make sure of the death of one defenceless woman. A cart stood at the entrance of the Conciergerie, a filthy wretched cart with muddy wheels, to which was harnessed an old white horse, in charge of a man disguised as a workman. It contained a bare plank, with no back, and there was a step-ladder by which to mount. The Queen climbed into the cart and sat down backwards. The priest, Girard, was with her and perseveringly reiterated his religious exhortations, of which she took no notice. She was pale, her eyes were bloodshot, and some grey locks of hair, unconfined by her cap, fluttered on her thin cheeks. Soldiers surrounded the cart, which proceeded slowly through a staring and almost silent crowd. Only from time to time were insults and vile jests audible, though Grammont the comedian, perched astride a horse, pranced near the cart, inciting those who mocked to further buffoonery. The Queen sat motionless, her head high, her lips compressed, as she is portrayed in David's sinister sketch, made as the procession was passing

the house in which he was. She was observed to shiver, and to become even paler as she passed the Tuileries.

At length, towards mid-day, the Place de la Révolution was reached. The cart stopped at the foot of the scaffold, which had been erected near the Pont Tournant, and in bitter mockery close to the great statue of Liberty. The Queen rose from the plank, Sanson holding loosely the cord attached to her wrists. She stepped easily and lightly down from the cart, refusing, despite her bound hands, the executioner's proffered assistance. She as quickly mounted the steps of the guillotine. As she did so, she accidentally stepped on Sanson's foot, and at his involuntary exclamation she turned to him with a "Pardon, Monsieur." He tore off her cap, and almost instantaneously her head fell. The executioner exhibited it to the crowd, which shouted in response: "*Vive la République!*" The actual execution lasted about four minutes; a quarter-past twelve was ringing just as all was over.

The Princess of Tarente, writing a few days afterwards observes: "The death of the King was gentle as compared with the Queen's. She suffered the long torture of imprisonment, of illness, of lengthy interrogations: she had not the comfort of seeing her children, nor the visits of Malesherbes, nor the consolations of religion, nor the imposing surroundings which sustain the fortitude of a great character."

Two weeks elapsed before the funeral. On the day of the execution the mangled remains of the Queen were carried to the little cemetery of the Madeleine, near the rue d'Anjou Saint-Honoré, where Louis XVI had been interred. Here, according to some witnesses, the body was flung on the grass and forgotten; others, again, declare that it was thrown on to a bed of quicklime. In any case, on November 1st, the grave-digger Joly dug a hole near the grave of the King, and buried

THE SIXTEENTH OF OCTOBER, 1793

[*A. Rischgitz*

[*face p. 312*

the remains of the martyred Queen. He then sent the following communication to the town Authorities:

"The widow Capet, bier 6 *livres*, grave and grave-diggers 15 *livres*—35."

This is the only official notice of the funeral of the Queen.

Twenty-two years after these events, on the 18th January 1815 some human dust was found, which was believed to be the mortal remains of Marie Antoinette, and on the spot was raised the small memorial building known as the Chapelle Expiatoire. A year later, on January 21st, the coffins of the King and Queen were removed with funeral pomp to the Cathedral of Saint-Denis, where they remain to this day.

In bringing this book to a close, I shall not venture on a summing-up of the character of my heroine. In the course of my narrative, I have endeavoured most sincerely to be strictly just and truthful in according both praise and blame. The last part of the Queen's life is beyond criticism: one can but reflect on it in silence: where facts are so eloquent, words are vain.

However, this much I will say—and I hope that my readers will feel as I do—a close scrutiny of the life of the last Queen of France has greatly increased the instinctive sympathy with which I have always regarded her. I believe it will ever be thus with those who, in the future, seriously undertake the study of the character of Marie Antoinette. Childishly frivolous during prosperity, courageous in danger, most pathetic during her agony; her story combines all the elements of interest calculated to impress the French mind: she pleases, she charms, she stirs to deep emotion. Her name will inspire generations to come, as long as there are any to smile kindly on youthful folly, to gaze with delight on grace and beauty, and to pity dire misfortune.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
THE EDINBURGH PRESS, 9 AND 11 YOUNG STREET, EDINBURGH